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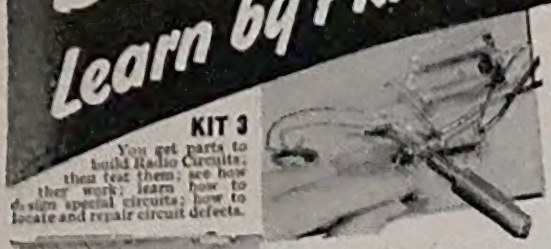

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JUNGLE STORIES

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Where did he come from?

How did he meet his beautiful mate Helene

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The Seven Silver Skulls of L'Gonda

By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

Only Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, dared battle the gris-gris monsters who sought the Seven Silver Skulls. But could even *his* panther-lithe strength save Helene from the altar of Elephant Death?

As the savage's knife flashed down, Ki-Gor shot the arrow.

DOWN the silent, tree-walled aisle of the river knifed a sleek canoe traveling fast under the expert stroking of two strikingly dissimilar men.

A grey-eyed, blonde-maned white man, his huge, powerful body naked save for a leopard skin breechclout, sat in the stern. In the prow crouched a squat, gnome-like black man. But the third member of the party, a woman who rode quietly in the center of the craft, was the most arresting one of the group.

She was fair of skin, with eyes blue as the evening sky and long hair like a cascade of living flame over her bare shoulders. Her curved, full-breasted body would

have evoked immediate and admiring attention in the most sophisticated capitals of the world.

These three were Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, his mate, Helene, and their fierce little friend, N'Geeso, chieftain of the pygmies. Vigilance was in the manner of each of them, for many and strange were the legends told of this trackless jungle area into which they came on a dangerous quest. It was known as the land of L'Gonda.

Now as they swept around a turn, Ki-Gor abruptly stiffened, his glance stabbing ahead to where the sluggish river narrowed. He saw two white ruffed monkeys go skittering into the high branches on the left bank, and then there were several bursts of color as frightened parakeets flung out of the forest on the right bank.

The White Lord heard the thrust of bodies through the underbrush, saw the gleam of sunlight on spear-points as the running figures burst out of the jungle at the narrow point in the river. With a cry to N'Geeso in the prow of the canoe, Ki-Gor dug his paddle deep. Under the swift, surging power of his strokes, the craft heeled over to the left.

N'Geeso responded as smoothly as though the maneuver had been rehearsed. Other than a tensing of the muscles about his mouth, he gave no sign this might well be a losing race with death.

Though alarm flared in Helen's blue eyes, she was cool in the face of the swift-striking danger. She bent low, rode with the sweeping turn. Her fingers tightened about the three spears laid along the floor of the craft and she gathered herself to leap ashore the moment the boat grounded. On land they would at least have a chance to defend themselves.

Then N'Geeso ducked his head and they splintered deep into the concealing reeds. Ki-Gor's final sweep of the paddle jarred the canoe against the bank. The pygmy chieftain dove over the bow, wrenched the boat onto land and held it while Helene and the White Lord went leaping past him. Ki-Gor and the pygmy recovered their spears from the girl on the run. But their headlong race for cover ended before they had taken a dozen steps.

Our armed figures, half concealed by undergrowth, stood waiting directly in their path. Ki-Gor snarled his wrath, swept his great, shovel-bladed Masai spear up for the thrust. Muscles flared out in writhing cables over his bronzed body and his feet dug hard against the forest loam as he swayed forward for the throw. Beside him, N'Geeso, like one of hell's fire-blackened demons, sprinted to the kill, shrilling the pygmy war-cry.

Then Helene screamed in alarm: "No! No! They're women!" But her warning was unneeded.

N'GEESO'S ringing challenge chopped off in mid-cry. The blonde-maned White Lord checked his terrifying lunge, wheeling half-about to divert his spear from its target. And in that moment the lives of at least two of the warrior-women were saved, for at that range Ki-Gor and the pygmy could not fail to kill.

Yet the faces of the four women gave no sign they realized how close to them the wings of death had brushed. Beneath their winged helmets, their chiseled brown features were stern and cold, and their spears were held firm and unmoving. Their black eyes were wary, but utterly without fear as they fanned out to halt any move Ki-Gor and his companions made to escape.

Even the usually inscrutable White Lord plainly showed his bewilderment. In years of wandering through the little-known sections of the Congo, he had come upon no more surprising sight than these women warriors. Tall, well-formed, broad of shoulder and long of leg, these Amazons suggested a masculine strength. And most puzzling of all was their skin tone; they were only a shading darker than the bronzed Ki-Gor.

"Can you understand me?" one of the women asked, looking at Helene. She spoke in Bantu, with a curious, but understandable accent.

"Yes," Ki-Gor replied.

The speaker's black eyes flashed irritably at Ki-Gor and then returned to Helene. "Do as you're told and you won't be harmed," she said.

Ki-Gor and N'Geeso exchanged a wondering glance. Then N'Geeso's wrinkled face crinkled under an unsuccessful attempt to control his acute pygmy's sense of the ridiculous. And the thought of

women, no matter how large, attempting to reassure him, chieftain of over a thousand fighting men, that he would come to no harm if he behaved was certainly ridiculous.

He let go a muffled laugh before he brought himself under control, and even then his shoulders continued to quake. A faint grin touched the White Lord's lips.

The woman glared at N'Geeso. "What is wrong with this stunted creature?" she asked Helene.

This time Helene answered. "Except for his refusal to harm a woman," she said, "you would be dead with his spear in your throat right now. It seems odd to him that you make veiled threats."

The woman gave a disdainful sniff.

"We are not easily hurt," she said humorlessly, "especially by the antics of men." But the glance she gave the huge spear on which Ki-Gor leaned negligently was rather thoughtful.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, suddenly, catching sight of a warrior-woman breaking from a low-growing ambush thicket. "Taanee, Leader of the First Guard, comes herself." She gave a low-voiced order and all four women straightened to attention.

Taanee's quick, dark eyes went coldly over the three strangers. Behind her came more of the female warriors.

She was handsomer than the others, her weapons and dress more richly ornamented. She wore a winged helmet and high-laced sandals with metal guards extending up over her smooth shins. Above a brief white loin cloth, she wore a girdle of linked metal, and her full breasts were confined in a metal corselet. A short sword hung from her slim waist, she carried a light spear in her right hand and held on her left arm a small, circular shield.

"Well done," she commended the four women. "Suba will wish to see these herself."

"They speak our tongue, after a fashion," ventured one of the women.

Taanee eyed Helene suspiciously. "How come you to be in our lands, woman?" she sternly questioned. "The fact that these two men of yours bear arms leads me to believe you are allies of the Tor-Ahdi."

Helene looked uncertainly at Ki-Gor, but he signaled her to answer.

"We come in friendship," Helene declared. "We come from far away where the sun dies to learn the peoples of this region. My husband, Ki-Gor, is a great hunter, the friend of many chieftains, and it is his pleasure to know all peoples of the jungle."

"Hmmm," Taanee said, unimpressed. "The land of Saadi-Sur is not open to every hungry wanderer."

Helene bridled at the guard leader's manner, but Ki-Gor interposed mildly before she could reply in kind to Taanee. "Take us to your chieftain," he offered, "and let him decide whether or not we are hungry wanderers."

Taanee smiled with secret amusement. "You prisoners shall get your wish."

In English, Helene said to her mate, "I don't like these people. Who do they think they are?"

"They're arrogant," agreed Ki-Gor, "but let us play along with them." Then to Taanee, he rebuked in Bantu, "As proof that we come as friends, our ears do not hear the name 'prisoners' which comes too quickly to your tongue."

An angry spark flared in the warrior-woman's eyes, but she veiled it quickly. "Ah, yes," she said, "and of course, as friends you would not wish to insult the ruler by bearing arms into her presence."

KI-GOR hesitated and N'Geeso openly frowned. Taanee had neatly impaled the White Lord on a point of jungle courtesy.

"True," Ki-Gor agreed, "but we will keep them until we reach the gate of your kraal."

But it was not a kraal to which Taanee escorted them. She led them instead for two hours at a brisk jog along dim, jasmine-choked trails, emerging at last on a broad, bare table of rock. The immense bombay trees about the clearing kept the morning sun from striking directly onto the stone, so the place was free of the jungle's close heat.

Three multi-colored tents were set up under a clump of jacarandas. The tents were great circular affairs with several openings so the sluggish breeze could circulate through them. Hanging from the top of the middle tent were seven silver skulls gleaming evilly in the sunlight. They were the size of human death's heads.

As Taanee took them toward the center tent, the bold-eyed women warriors of Saadi-Sur stared with open interest at the three strangers and gathered close when they stopped to drop their war gear at a point indicated by Taanee.

Then from the striped tent came a striking woman, with the look of a war goddess. Her arms and clothing were in no wise different from those of the other women, but in her dark, magnificent eyes, her firm, straight mouth, the very air with which she carried herself was the quality of command. She was obviously Suba, absolute ruler of Saadi-Sur, in the great land of L'Gonda.

A zebra-skin stool was brought for her and she sat down, somehow alone in all that gathering. Taanee advanced and dropped to one knee before her.

"I bring prisoners, O Queen, caught skulking not far from here," the guard leader explained. "A woman with two armed men."

"So!" Suba said sharply. Her glance drove to Helene. "Come here, you," she ordered imperiously.

But it was Ki-Gor who stepped forward. The reprimand on her lips died as her searching glance went over him. Suba's raised hand stopped those who swayed forward to bar the White Lord's way. Ki-Gor noticed for the first time the bandage wrapped about the queen's right arm.

There was a glitter of irritation in the jungle man's grey eyes. He made no obeisance to the queen, and only with an effort did he keep his voice soft with courtesy. "With your permission, O Queen, may I explain the simple truth of our presence. There seems little likelihood you will hear it from this Taanee, if we are to judge by her beginning."

A flush of rage suffused Taanee's face, and she trembled with the effort of maintaining her composure. Suba's coldly beautiful face revealed no inkling of her own thoughts.

"I ask your leave, O Suba," asked Taanee, "to punish this insolent prisoner. He needs to be taught a man's place."

"All in good time," the tall queen said. "Let us hear what he has to say." She confronted Ki-Gor. "I warn you to give careful thought to your words. Your manner hardly wins my favor."

Ki-Gor was unmoved by the velvet threat in Suba's words. He introduced Helene, N'Geeso and himself, told how they had come into this country for no other reason than to learn something of the peoples who inhabited it. He mentioned the various tribes they had stopped with.

"But when we wished to follow the river into this land you call L'Gonda," he related, "the black men told us to turn back, that an ancient curse lay over it and that within the memory of men all tribes had avoided it."

THE queen's voice was feather-quiet. "Why didn't you heed their warning? Is not the garnered wisdom of many generations a wise guide?"

"I wanted to know the truth," Ki-Gor said simply.

"You know it then," the handsome Suba said, straightening. "We are the curse they fear. Our ancestors drove them from Saadi-Sur, blackened the forest with their dead, and ordered them never to return. Since then our patrols have made certain the few foolhardy black men who ventured into our lands never got out again."

Taanee laughed scoffingly at Ki-Gor's story. "These dangoes who serve Tykar are always ready with a tale," she observed. "Come now, what cowardly deed were you sent to perform?" With a knowing look, she turned to the queen. "Ask him, O Suba, why he tried to escape us if he came with clean hands. But for the thoroughness of our trap he would have gotten away into the jungle."

Now Helene took her place at the White Lord's side. From the murmurs of the women, it was plain they sided with Taanee in the belief that the strangers were sent by this Tykar.

"My husband saw armed figures running to cut us off at a narrow point in the river," she said heatedly. "He turned to shore. A small, open canoe is no place to fight off an attack. When he saw that the warriors were women, of course, he didn't wish to harm them."

Suba was attentive to each of them, but her eyes kept wandering past them to the far end of the clearing where the bombax trees grew thick. It was from that way that Tykar, ruler of Tor-Ahdi, the infamous city of L'Gonda, would appear.

"We know nothing of your enemies," Ki-Gor said, but before he could continue a guard came hurriedly from one of the tents, and in obvious distress, knelt beside Suba.

The queen registered swift concern at the woman's whispered information. She stood up and her eyes searched over her retainers with a kind of desperation. She waved her hand abruptly, indicating that Ki-Gor and the others should stand away.

"The prisoners can wait," she said tautly. "That cursed Tykar has beaten us with another of his foul tricks. Oonae is dead—poisoned! She was our one hope to defeat Tykar in single combat."

And as the queen angrily talked on, it became clear why Oonae's death was so serious. Each year the two jungle kingprovince of L'Gonda pitted their two greatest warriors against each other in a battle to the death. The victor won for his people exclusive rights during the coming year to the lower hunting grounds, and also the right to hang the silver skulls publicly, to proclaim their superiority.

Not until later was Ki-Gor to learn the background of this odd arrangement. It had been instituted many generations before, after constant warfare between the rival powers of Sur and Tor-Ahdi had almost decimated both peoples. As game became scarcer the lower hunting grounds often made the difference between famine or plenty.

"That devil has somehow tricked us again," Suba declared. "Oonae might have won for us." Her face was dark with anger. It was obvious how heavy lay this sudden burden on her shoulders.

"I know not which way to turn," she confessed to her warriors. Rubbing her right arm, she probed the area covered by the bandage. "How can I knowingly send one of my faithful friends to her death? I alone can come close to matching Tykar's strength and skill..."

"The arrow wound in your arm is not fully healed," argued one serious Amazon. "Aye, it looks now as if that mysterious arrow were part of Tykar's treachery."

"Necessity leaves me no other course," Suba said. "My arm is well enough." But the manner in which she unconsciously fingered the wound showed that she lied.

The second outburst of protests from her followers was cut short by a blare of sound from the far end of the clearing. Ki-Gor's eyes followed those of the women warriors. From the green swell of jungle came men agleam with the gear of war. A double file of trumpeters marched in their fore, sounding mighty gusts on curled, deep-throated horns.

The elite guards of Tor-Ahdi marched with Tykar, their chief, and their dramatic entrance was plainly a thing carefully thought out in advance. Seeing them, Ki-Gor could not know that the forebears of these men had been the same as those of the women warriors, could not guess at the split which had once torn a kingdom asunder and sent the male founders of Tor-Ahdi away to inter-marry with captured black women.

The men, for the most part, were short-

er than Suba's followers, and none of them was so light-skinned as the women. Besides their darker coloring, they showed the infusion of Negroid blood in their broad faces, flat noses, and large lips.

Ki-Gor was later to have cause to learn some of their less pleasing characteristics. But already he could feel the hot burn of hatred which drove out from the women of Saadi-Sur toward the men of Tor-Ahdi, and he instinctively knew this hate had been forged by the fiery passions of many generations.

When the warriors halted before the silent semi-circle of women, their ranks split apart and from their center strode a heavy-shouldered, powerful man with a sneering smile of greeting on his loose lips. He was inches taller than the others and by far the lightest in color. He drew his sword in a sweeping gesture, touched it to his forehead in sardonic salute to the queen. A faint nod was her only reply.

"So we meet again, O Suba," he said, "to let the gods decide whether Saadi-Sur or Tor-Ahdi is greatest in L'Gonda."

Suba's lips curled scornfully. The tapping of her right hand against her sword hilt betrayed the direction of her thoughts.

"It is the way of the brave to let the gods decide," she snapped. "It is the way of the jackal, though, to take no chances on a fair fight."

If Suba thought her thinly veiled reference to Oonae's poisoning would disturb Tykar, she was mistaken. He neatly turned her words, making it seem he thought them a compliment.

"True, true!" he cried. "And indeed ours is the way of the brave."

Tykar balanced the sword in his hand, savoring the feel of it.

"With your leave, O Suba," he said in his insulting manner, "let us dispense with the reading of the Ancient Writ. We know the terms well. I should like to get the business settled and return to my hunting grounds." He paused apologetically. "Not that your company is unpleasing, but the ruler of Tor-Ahdi has many duties, whatever his own desires might be."

He sank his insult home with a polite smile, and Suba received with only the faintest narrowing of her eyes the inference that she was the head of a kingdom too unimportant to require much direction.

"So be it," she agreed, the words slow and heavy on her tongue.

"As it is not my custom to delegate the dangerous tasks to others," Tykar said loudly, "I fight for Tor-Ahdi myself."

The purpose in his careful taunts was clear. Suba came to her feet, her lips a thin, white line.

"Since our champion was murdered within a breath of your appearance, we are not surprised at your show of bravery." She snarled as anger shattered her control. "From the day your elder brother died so suddenly and you took the throne, it is strange how many 'accidents' have befallen our champions on the eve of battle."

Tykar's laugh was a harsh, ugly thing. He had smashed Suba's glacial calm and now he drove her nearer to the brink of ruin.

"You have proof of these wild charges?" he asked smoothly, then answered himself. "No, of course not! Desperation clouds your brain, O Suba, and realizing this, I do not permit myself to hear your foolish insults. Listen to what is talked in the by-paths of Saadi-Sur as well as in Tor-Ahdi if you need an explanation. It is said that fear of Tykar's sword drives your champions to seek the easy release of suicide. It is said that your noble women have grown too craven to fight for the needs of their people!"

An outraged roar went up from the women warriors and for a moment Ki-Gor thought the camp would erupt with a sudden, furious battle. But the tradition of peace at this annual conclave was an ancient one, and when Suba rasped her sword from its scabbard and waved back her excited followers, they quieted.

"I fight for Saadi-Sur!" grated the queen, and she stepped forward into the circle left around Tykar.

The press of the crowd had forced Ki-Gor, Helene and Taanee close to Suba. Taanee shoved forward now, caught at the queen.

"No, Suba!" she pleaded. "Your arm is unhealed. Let me face the swaggering braggart."

Even in her wrath, Suba was touched by the gallant offer. She paused and her hand clutched Taanee's shoulder in a warrior's grip of thanks.

"It is my place, faithful one," she said,

"but my blessings go with you for your loyalty."

Tykar watched narrowly, his sword held ready, a cruel smile curling his lips. Ki-Gor stared at him in amazement. This man actually meant to fight a battle to the death with a woman, a wounded woman, at that.

The jungle-bred White Lord was inured to violence, hardened to the cruel, primitive practices of the Congo. Here the law of fang and tooth was still the final law for man as well as beast. But now he was seized with disgust. When the barbaric people about him made no move to prevent the fight, it was inevitable he should interfere.

Almost by instinct rather than thought that made him suddenly turn to the unwary guard beside him, twist her sword free, and plunge into the cleared space where Suba and Tykar prepared to batle with steel.

Ki-Gor came out of the crowd in a lunge. Before Suba knew what transpired, his arm swept her away behind him. His sword wove out and rang a warning against the astounded Tykar's steel.

"You've croaked your boasts, brown-skin," he roared.

"Now fight!"

Tykar leaped back as though stabbed, his mouth dropping in astonishment. He had been so engrossed in his baiting of the queen that he had not noticed the White Lord.

Ki-Gor was immediately after the ruler of Tor-Ahdi, and again his quick blade rang a warning clash against the man's sword.

"Are you struck deaf?" growled Ki-Gor. "Come. If you must have battle, at least seek it with a man!"

Tykar finally found his tongue. "What stupid joke is this?" he cried, and the blood ran to his face. "Has Saadi-Sur come to such pass that one of its soft, painted men thinks to come to the queen's rescue."

Then Suba threw herself on the White Lord like a raging wildcat, tossing him to the side with a surprising strength, slapping him a ringing blow with the flat of her sword.

"Fool!" she snarled. "You'll die for this."

II

RED with shame, the queen faced Tykar. She had no course but to mumble bitter apologies.

"I regret this deeply," she said. "This man will be flayed alive. I beg you to overlook this fool's interference. Continue with our contest!"

Tykar was in full possession of his wits now. The anger he had felt at Ki-Gor's appearance was gone. He saw how shamed and shaken the queen was, how sick were the faces of the women of Saadi-Sur, and an exultant joy swept up in him.

This dull-witted man was an instrument ready-made for the further humbling of these hated women. Always he had found their pride an invulnerable barrier. Now chance had given him an opening, and he meant to get the most from it.

In the swift race of his thoughts, it naturally did not occur to him that Ki-Gor was not of Saadi-Sur. Tykar's world envisioned no other fair-skinned people than these and though this man's hair was a strange color, there was no knowing what the pampered dandies of *Sur* would do with their scents and potions.

And as the finest swordsman of Tor-Ahdi, certainly Tykar had no cause for a moment's worry about the outcome of battle. This Ki-Gor must be the queen's current favorite to be so inflamed with love that he would invite death for her.

Hai! What a joke that one of the degenerate men of Saadi Sur should actually challenge him.

"No so fast, Suba," Tykar haughtily said. "Through your negligence, I have been insulted by this creature of yours: It is impossible—nay, unthinkable—that I should pass it off so lightly as you request."

Suba's shoulders drooped. She had feared this reaction.

"Very well," she said dispiritedly. "If you insist, I will have him punished before our duel continues."

Ki-Gor, bewildered by the way Suba had reacted stood to the side, listening to this talk which made no sense to him. Despite the large number of hostile guards around him, he had no fear. In one sudden move, he could cut through the crowd and melt into overhanging branches of the trees a few paces away.

"He must be punished all right," declared Tykar, "but I insist on the right to mete out the punishment myself." He looked about him in a grandly indignant manner. "He shall have the fight he asked! I will kill him with my sword, and as you watch, O women of Saadi Sur, may you blush at this farce which you have caused to precede your queen's entrance on the field of battle."

With bowed head, Suba retreated to her low stool, too sick at heart to even watch the slaying of the man. The guards who had moved to grasp Ki-Gor if the queen ordered it, fell back silently. The White Lord found himself alone in the center of the hostile, silent crowd.

It was so quiet he easily heard Helene's low cry of dismay, N'Geeso's angry growl of encouragement. "Spit him like a plucked bird," the chieftain urged in the pygmy tongue, "and then we'll see how easy flows the blood of these other dangoes."

Tykar moved out now, his sword flashing little glints of light as he flicked it against Ki-Gor's blade. "Your ears first, look without them." He circled, his steel keeping up the soft metallic tapping as he deliberately waited for the fear to come into his opponent.

Ki-Gor pivoted with him, a queer, jerky awkwardness in his movements. He held his sword rigidly before him, seemingly too unskilled even to avoid the insulting tap, tap of Tykar's contemptous weapon.

WITH his full attention devoted to the White Lord for the first time, Tykar was given a moment's pause as he realized the size of the man, saw the swell of muscles across his chest and along his arms. But Ki-Gor's clumsiness and the growing look of helplessness of his slack-jawed face swept away this momentary doubt.

"Ha! Timid One," he taunted, "you find your soft little love tricks of little use here. Your talents are not appreciated as much in battle as in the sleeping rooms of *Sur.*"

Tykar gave a sneering laugh and his feet beat a swift tattoo as he leaped in at Ki-Gor.

Only Helene and N'Geeso were not surprised at what happened next. The White Lord wove back a step, spun to the side, and then with a shattering beat of steel, took the iniative from his foe.

Gone now was his mask of clumsiness. With pantherish grace, he tore away Tykar's guard. His snaking blade whirled close against the boastful man's head. It rang in three swift blows against the silver helmet. With a deftness that only a master swordsman could have possessed, Ki-Gor knocked the helmet awry.

Tykar tried to gather himself, tried to beat off this unexpected tornado of steel. He brought his circular shield into play as he staggered back, and its brazen clang told of blows deflected away from his belly. But the rattled Tykar misread the White Lord's purpose. Ki-Gor's sword abruptly left the furious body attack, snaked in at the right ear exposed when Tykar's helmet had been nearly knocked off.

Tykar jerked his head and mouthed a furious, shocked oath.

The White Lord bounded back away from the man to stand motionlessly, his face expressionless while he watched his stunned opponent. There was the faintest touch of red on his swordpoint.

Tykar's complexion was a sickly yellow. His mouth was fish like. A stream of scarlet flowed from a clean-cut ridge which was all that remained of his right ear. The severed ear itself had fallen almost at the feet of the queen.

The astounded onlookers could not believe their eyes. N'Geeso's shrill cry of

approval was the first sound to break the quiet. Then a delighted roar broke from the women warriors. Gone in the instant was the dismal shame which had gripped them, gone was their burning hatred of the blundering prisoner.

Unwilling to watch what she thought would be a ridiculous execution, Suba had missed the stroke. But the burst of sound brought her gaze up and she saw Tykar shaking with anger.

"By the sacred war goddess, herself," she shouted in wonder, "he's marked Tykar for life!"

To a civilized person, the savage pleasure which flooded Suba's face would have been beyond understanding. Only one of her own wild, barbaric stripe could have adequately known how far-reaching was the importance of Ki-Gor's sword stroke. By that one blow he had made Tykar lose face completely. That missing ear would be an everlasting reminder of the day a slave of Saadi-*Sur* had made a fool of him.

"At him, blonde one!" she cried, springing to her feet. "Give us his head this time. On him before he gathers his wits!"

But Ki-Gor made no move. He had no desire to kill the man or he would have struck him down in that first onslaught when all thhe advantage of surprise lay on his side. He felt a disgust for the miserable braggart, but no personal enmity.

"Agree victory in the contest belongs to *Sur*," Ki-Gor said, "and you may leave unharmed."

"Trickery won you a lucky blow," claimed Tykar. "But now I am warned. I will kill you."

He had felt the strength and speed of Ki-Gor's arm. He knew now he had a real battle before him, but he could not quit before his men. He came on cautiously and the women fell quiet, inwardly doubting that Ki-Gor could stand against a serious onslaught.

Suba frowned. "Quick, Taanee, give him your shield," she ordered. A minute before she had not cared that Ki-Gor went unprotected into the duel.

But Taanee was slow to move and the queen's call acted as a spur to Tykar. He had no notion of allowing Ki-Gor to secure the same protection which his armor gave him. He closed furiously with the White Lord, occupying him so desperately that he had no chance to reach for the shield. Back Ki-Gor went, step by step, unable for all his skill to halt that swarming attack.

Ki-Gor had long ago learned to wield the short cruel blades favored by savage Congo tribes but it was not a sport that was particularly to his liking. He had forgotten many of the delicate tricks of Congo swordmanship. Fighting with the short, heavy sword which both the warriors of Saadi-*Sur* and Tor-Ahdi employed, Ki-Gor was at a disadvantage in fending off that wild onslaught.

But gradually the memory of that primitive, swirling style of battle came back to him and he caught the feel of the short sword in his hand.

Gradually his retreat slowed, although the straining momentum of Tykar's attack swelled ever higher. The brown-skinned leader was a picture of hate incarnate, veins distended, eyes bulging, his breath a loud, quick rasp.

Ki-Gor braced and brought Tykar to a standstill. Then he began to circle to the left, always the left, making it difficult for Tykar to bring his shield into effective use. More and more Tykar was forced to utilize his blade for both defense and attack.

"Stand and fight, you dango," grunted Tykar.

Ki-Gor's answer was a thin smile as he circled faster. By the brown man's lights this was no way to fight. Tykar began to feel ludicrous, unable to harm Ki-Gor, unable to stop this undignified whirling. The quick laughter of the women stung him, yet he could not cry foul. He had forfeited that right by accepting a foe considered by everyone as unworthy of his steel, and to make matters worse, he had breeched the dueling etiquette by refusing to allow Ki-Gor to don helmet and shield.

KI-GOR had been awaiting his chance. Tykar was turning almost mechanically now at the center of the circle which Ki-Gor paced about him. Abruptly, the White Lord abandoned his clock-wise circling, leaping back in the opposite direction. Tykar was a fraction late in following. In that interval, in which Tykar was

off-balance and off-guard, Ki-Gor was in on him.

The jungle man beat away Tykar's faltering sword with two ringing blows which carried his full strength. He feinted the man's shield low. And then with the flat of his sword, he hit Tykar across the right side of the face, hit him as though he were wielding a club.

Tykar gave an odd, explosive grunt, spun half around and toppled like a felled tree. He lay flat on his back, eyes rolled up in his head, completely senseless.

Ki-Gor stepped back, his grey eyes striking had against the close-packed warriors of Tor-Ahdi. He could have beheaded Tykar, but he had thought it a wiser course to completely humble the man. Tykar's posturing heroics would not look so well after this.

"Your chief was defeated in fair fight!" he declared. "Since I fought for the women of Saadi-*Sur,* the hunting grounds over which you wrangled now go to them." A harsh challenge entered his tone. "If there be one among you who disputes this, let him argue his case with a sword. Only this time I fight to kill!"

The White Lord's words came fast, while the shock of his victory still held the crowd.

"This cannot be," protested one of Tykar's nobles. "The contest was to be between our lord and the Queen Suba."

"Think you that Tykar is in any condition to hold a sword?" asked Ki-Gor. "Of course, if you insist we could throw water on him and let him take his chances with the queen."

And to that they had no answer. It was obvious Tykar couldn't possibly fight again that day, and tradition generations-old said that the contest had to be fought at this particular time. None of the warriors cared to challenge Ki-Gor now that they realized he had been toying with the most feared swordsman of Tor-Ahdi. And Suba's women were belligerently ready to back up their uninvited champion if trouble came.

With much grumbling and threatening the men of Tor-Ahdi picked up their leader and retired from the field. Suba stood, a little smile on her face, as she watched them go.

"Blood will run because of this," she warned, "but by the sacred ritual, it has been worth it." She clapped Ki-Gor on the shoulder. "Come with me to the fortress of Saadi-*Sur,* strange one! I would know more of you."

Ki-Gor studied her blandly. "Did I not hear talk of my being tortured to death?"

Her laugh was quiet and deep. "I have different plans for you now," she said, "aye, very different plans." And her eyes went over him admiringly.

III

THE fortress of Saadi-*Sur* was a strange sight in dense, unknown reach of the Congo. It lay behind thick earthen walls, a squat, square city of jumbled structures and narrow twisting streets. Houses and shops were built of a haphazard blending of wood, stone and clay, as though the artisans, when one material ran out, used whichever other happened to be nearest at hand.

But age had softened the patchwork effect, painting all with a grey, worn look. A sense of the citidel's ancientness possessed one from the moment the great-timbered gates swung open to permit passage into the deep-worn streets.

The queen's huge palace lay in the center of the town. An open square surrounded it, and it was the one structure Ki-Gor saw that was wholly constructed of stone. The straight, high walls made it a small fortress in itself. Women guards, stern and martial as any ruler's troops, were everywhere about the building. In the palace were housed all those of noble blood.

Suba gave orders for Helene to be taken to one section of the palace and Ki-Gor and N'Geeso to another. When the White Lord protested that they did not wish to be separated, the queen smiled reassuringly.

"I am sorry," she apologized, "but even guests must observe our customs in this matter. In *Sur,* it is forbidden for men and women to be quartered together. "Helene," she went on, phrasing the alien name slowly, "will be given every attention. You may see her whenever you wish."

Ki-Gor did not like the arrangement, but the women had been so friendly that he hated to appear suspicious. Every tribe

had its own peculiar taboos and it was wise for a stranger to respect them.

N'Geeso and he were led by a woman guard through a maze of corridors to the sleeping quarters reserved for men. Here they were turned over to a slight, grey-haired man dressed in a blue tunic, with instructions that they be fed and given a place to rest during the afternoon heat. He was the first male they had seen since arriving in Saadi-*Sur*.

Silently, with the obsequious manners of a household slave, the old man showed them into a small room floored with several thicknesses of carpet and strewn with great, soft cushions. When Ki-Gor tried to talk with him, he bowed and nodded but spoke not a word. He disappeared briefly to return with a platter of food.

Ki-Gor and N'Geeso regarded the platter with open disappointment. Where they hungered for their customary meat-heavy diet, they were brought scanty portions of fruit and nuts. N'Geeso ate morosely for a time after the old man was gone. Then suddenly he burst into low-voiced speech.

"I like not the smell nor look,' he declared feelingly, "of these lordly women and this age-rotted nest of theirs. This is a strange unnatural place, and no good can come of our being here."

He pulled worriedly at his lower lip, staring up from beneath his brows at Ki-Gor, not liking to say what was in his mind.

"I agree with you," Ki-Gor granted, selecting a purple plum, "but you know the real reason we came here. Large numbers of natives have been disappearing from the kraals in this region. We must take our chances here until we learn whether Suba or Tykar are involved in slaving or whether Arabs are taking advantage of this taboo area to cover their dealings."

N'Geeso locked his arms about his knees, rocked back and forth in moody thought.

"We should have come at the head of my warriors," the pygmy muttered regretfully. "My men have no fear of the taboos and devils which frighten the rabbit-hearted warriors of these parts. Aaaiiieee! Suba would quickly tell us what we want to know once she saw my brave ones gathered about her walls."

Ki-Gor smiled at the war-like little chieftain, knowing nothing would have pleased N'Geeso more than to throw a scare into these women warriors and send Tykar and his nobles skittering through the jungle in fear of their lives.

"No, little brother," KiGor disagreed. "With these people, the appearance of an army means war. "If we can achieve our purpose peacefully we have done a much greater thing than if we had come with a thousand angry warriors."

N'Geeso knew it was useless to argue.

"I don't like it," the pygmy said firmly, "but I'll do as you say. Have a care, however, with this Suba. She has a look in her eye concerning you."

Ki-Gor looked up in astonishment. Of all the queer ideas that N'Geeso managed to conjure up, he thought, this was the queerest yet. The White Lord was utterly without vanity concerning his attractions for the opposite sex.

N'Geeso sprawled comfortably on the carpeting, prepared, despite all his fears for their future, to enjoy a nap. He closed his eyes peacefully, then cocked one eye open at Ki-Gor.

"And do not look at me as if my wits were scrambled," he said as a parting shot. "In dealing with men and their affairs, O Ki-Gor, you are the wisest of men, but about women you know nothing."

AS the afternoon slipped away, Ki-Gor grew weary of the inactivity. He roused N'Geeso and suggested they look about for themselves. They wandered down the hall, peering into a succession of rooms all like their own, and just when they were beginning to believe the whole wing was deserted, they heard the buzz of many voices through a wide arched door.

They looked into a large, rectangular chamber, high ceilinged and cool, with a clear pool of water extending down the center. It was somehow disconcerting finally to discover a group of men in this city of women. Perhaps forty men lolled about the room, and another eight or ten bathed in the pool. Ki-Gor was surprised to hear his own name emerge repeatedly from the animated talk of the small groups sitting and standing about the pool. As in every seat of government, no matter how large or small, gossip traveled fast. Word of the White Lord's exploits had already swept through the palace.

Suddenly, one of the tunic-clad men spotted Ki-Gor and N'Geeso. "Welcome, men of the outerlands," he said, and came forward, smiling. A few others followed his lead, but the majority stood back, a mixture of shyness and hostility in their manner.

"I am Tal," the man said, his glance assessing the White Lord. He swiftly introduced those who had followed him. "All praise to you for the way you showed up Tykar," he paused, dropping his voice before adding—"and the women. We hunger for the full story."

"Stories have a custom of growing in the retelling." Ki-Gor smiled. "My friend and I are worn with long traveling. We would be in debt to you and companions if we might bathe in the pool."

As he spoke, the White Lord's eyes were missing nothing. The soft handsomeness of these men, almost a prettiness, and their mild look was in sharp contrast to the formidable women.

Ki-Gor was amazed and intrigued at this strange reversal of affairs. The men were well-made, but they were smaller than the women, and their graceful bodies were undeveloped muscularly. And in the attitude of most of the group he sensed that same hostility with which any exclusive society of women might receive a potentially dangerous outsider.

"You are certain the others do not mind our bathing?" he asked.

"Don't mind them," Tal said understandingly. "Once it is definitely settled which woman will choose you, they'll be more friendly. It is always this way when they face the competition of a new man, for the affections of our lordly masters.

Though usually imperturbable, Ki-Gor could not conceal his irritation. Tal's words were even plainer than N'Geeso's.

"You can relieve their fears," he said gruffly. "I have no interest in their women. Tell them I have a wife I would not exchange for all of the women in *Sur*."

Tal regarded him with a mildly amused air.

"I hardly think my explanations would banish ther suspicions," Tal said. "And while I am talking, it might be well to warn you to watch out for the one called Vion." He indicated a handsome but cruel-looking dandy across the wide room. "He has the most to lose, and the most likelihood of losing it, if the gossip be anywhere near the truth."

"Why should that be?" asked the White Lord, for he saw that Vion was indeed glaring at him.

"He is Suba's favorite" answered Tal wonderingly, as though Ki-Gor's inquiry was rather foolish.

Ki-Gor gave a disgusted snort, embarrassed by such ridiculous talk. "If the men of *Sur* be such fools," he growled, "why is it you seem not to share their feelings?"

"That's simple," Tal answered with good-humored frankness. "I have no woman to lose. You will find I am unpopular because I speak out against the customs which hold men in subjection, playthings of the pompous women of *Sur*. Once the men of *Sur* were warriors of a king named Alexander. But that of course was centuries ago."

He laughed, but there was bitterness in his voice.

"Aye, there are a few of us who dare gamble our lives by such rebel talk," he declared, glancing around at the others who had come forward with him to greet N'Geeso and Ki-Gor. "No woman would dare take one of us as her own. She would be ruined for all time with the court." His eyes narrowed reminiscently. "Of course, there are those who do not mind seeking us out secretly, but even they stand together with the others when we try to regain any of our ancient rights."

It was not Ki-Gor's desire to mix in the strange troubles of this archaic little kingdom. Not knowing the long shaping of history which had formed this strange so-

ciety, he could not respect these womanish men and their harem-like existence. If Ki-Gor did not like a thing, he did not put up with it. According to his lights, if these men did not like their existence then they should not submit to it.

N'Geeso had taken no part in the conversation, but his sharp eyes and ears had missed nothing. He did not find the situation as patently absurd as did his white friend, and thus, he more accurately sensed a lurking danger. As though it were only a natural thing to do, he picked up the leopard skin loin cloths which they had discarded, taking care to also bring the sheathed knives.

As Ki-Gor plunged into the pool, N'Geeso sat down on the edge as if to rest, dropping the discarded loin-cloths beside him. He trailed a leg in the water, but despite his relaxed look the loyal little man actually was watchful as a crouching leopard. Of a more suspicious nature than Ki-Gor, he did not trust these strangers and he meant to see that none of them harmed his friend in this rare moment when he was unarmed.

EVEN KI-GOR did not suspect N'Geeso's purpose, and he kept joking the pygmy about being too lazy to swim. Vion, the queen's jealous favorite, edged toward the pool. It is probable he would never have been stirred to action had not an old man scurried into the chamber, anxiously demanding whether anyone had seen the two strangers.

When Tal wordlessly pointed to the pool, the old man gave a sigh of relief. Then in a voice which all could hear, he announced to Ki-Gor and N'Geeso, "Our gracious queen commands your attendance, O men of the outer lands, at the banquet now being readied in the royal chambers."

Ki-Gor nodded and started leisurely toward the side of the pool. He failed to notice the tense, frozen attitudes of the other men, the breathless way in which they watched the courier. But the old man had played this small drama before.

He glanced about, letting his eyes slide knowingly from man to man, while a look of malice crept into his face. Now that he was old, relegated to a life of menial duties, his only triumphs were these moments when the young peacocks hung breathlessly on his words. And well they might, for it was easy to read the rise and fall of their fortunes in his announcements of those invited to court functions.

"The queen commands the following men to be present," he said, and then slowly he pronounced the names of the invited. Vion began to tremble as the courier progressed. Then when the final name was read, Vion stared wildly at the old man, his lips jerking, his face like parchment.

Vion was not among the invited. The queen's favorite had fallen. Remembering the arrogant airs of the young man, the grey-haired courier gave a high, thin cackle of triumph as he turned to leave the room.

That laughter shattered Vion's last vestige of control. They were all laughing at him, this spiteful crew he had lorded it over for so long. And the hateful cause of his fall was the blonde-maned stranger reaching now to draw himself out of the pool.

With an inarticulate scream of rage, he whirled toward Ki-Gor, whipping a small, jeweled dagger from his tunic. "You'll not live to enjoy your triumph!" he cried, darting at the White Lord.

Ki-Gor, his hands planted wide on the floor, one leg swung up out of the pool, was a perfect target for a quick stab in the back. Before the danger adequately registered, Vion was almost on him. All the onlookers but one were paralyzed by the jealous man's murderous charge.

That one was the faithful N'Geeso! He shot up from his sitting position, the dynamic strength of his squat body exploding through the languid guise he had assumed. He took two swift, lashing steps and dove headlong to intercept Vion. Miraculously, a naked blade was in his hand.

Vion's dagger darted at Ki-Gor's back. Then N'Geeso crashed into him. Vion screamed and the two men went hurtling along the edge of the pool in a wild scramble of arms and legs.

Fully aware now of what transpired, the uninjured White Lord vaulted from the pool and reached the antagonists before they stopped skidding. He saw then why Vion had cried out in pain. The pygmy had fended off the dagger blow by impaling the man's arm on his own knife.

Ki-Gor was barely in time to save the would-be assassin's life. N'Geeso had steadied himself with monkey-like agility and ripped his knife from Vion's arm. He was already braced for the quick one-two slash which would decapitate his foe. He handled Vion like a child, for despite his lesser bulk, he had the acquired knowledge of countless life and death battles at his disposal, whereas his opponent knew nothing of the tricks of rough and tumble fighting. Vion had even lost his knife in the scramble.

"No!" shouted Ki-Gor, seizing his friend. "Let him live."

With a snarl of disgust, N'Geeso shoved Vion in the face like a ruffled fighting cock pulled from a stupid barnyard rooster.

"This man deserves no mercy," he growled. "If you value not your own life, there are others who do. This sneaking dango will try again and next time he may succeed."

Vion feared the White Lord meant to kill him. He lay flat on his back, wretched and afraid, clasping his wounded arm in silent pain. All the fight was gone out of him.

"Fool," Ki-Gor said to him softly, and the whole crowd had gathered close about them. "If you be an example of the men of Sur, then I am sorry for you all."

IV

SUBA seated Taanee on her right, Ki-Gor on her left. The queen's sixty-odd guests were ranged in a loose circle on the floor. Helene and N'Geeso were placed across the room from the White Lord.

The invited nobles leaned in leisurely attitudes on the stacked cushions placed about for their convenience, chatting while elderly men filed in with platters of food. There were exclamations of surprise at the abundance of meat, vegetables and fruit.

"To make it plain to Tykar," explained Suba, "that his defeat, even though it was by a man, gives us the lower hunting grounds, I sent our hunters in immediately."

"Good," murmurred a woman. "If we showed any hesitancy, any doubt of our rights to the lands, that vulture would cry we had cheated him. If we are firm, he may accept the decision without causing trouble."

Suba was serious as she regarded the speaker. The guests had stopped their talking to listen. Though their gayety had previously covered it, this was a matter which worried them all.

"There was no trouble today," the queen revealed. "Tykar's huntsmen were nowhere in evidence, but we must not underestimate those scheming curs at Tor-Ahdi. I'll tell you now a thing that has been in my mind for a long time."

Suba's face lost its genial look. A hard, bright fire came into he rdark eyes.

"Tykar thought to bring *Sur* to ruin through peaceful means," she declared. "He knew we would never break the treaty, so year after year he has used trickery to win the knife battle, meaning to starve us out. The mysterious fires which have constantly ravaged the upper hunting grounds were set by his hunters to hasten the process. Only by luck do we still have the seven silver skulls."

Ki-Gor felt the grimness which settled over the whole company of handsome Amazons. He could read in their expressions the fact that they had long lived in fear, had long fought a losing battle for survival.

"While Tor-Ahdi has grown in strength," Suba went on, "we have become fewer. We have protected the purity of our blood at the cost of fertility, while with their black wenches, they have spawned larger and larger broods."

Even the elderly men who served the assemblage had stopped in their tracks to listen to the queen's fateful words.

"I am certain Tykar will not accept today's decision," Suba said. "But I have decided that come what may, we will not retreat another step before him. If he wishes to use this incident to provoke jungle warfare, then let him!"

Taanee glanced hesitantly about her, started to speak, then seemed to think better of it. But Suba had noticed her expression, urged her and the others to speak their minds freely now that the subject had come up.

"It is said Tykar had many trained warriors which we have never seen," Taanee stated, "an army secretly raised and

trained. Can we hope to wage a successful war against such odds?"

The woman guard who had previously cried approval of taking a firm stand against Tykar glowered angrily at Taanee.

"Bah! One of us is worth ten of those dangoes," she blustered. "Never did I think to hear Taanee utter such words."

"War may mean the end of Saadi-*Sur*, may mean death or slavery for us all. But, by the gods, is not that the way of honor rather than skulking inside of our walls, swallowing the insults of those upstarts, letting their shadow fall darker over us every day."

Silence held the Amazon Warriors, a silence during which they were forced to see their future in the harsh, cruel light of reality. Then across the room, a broad-shouldered woman with a scar across her cheek, leaped to her feet.

"Why not beat Tykar at his own game," she suggested. "Let us strike the first blow!"

Suba shook her head. "We won't be the ones to break the treaty."

"Besides," said another woman, "it would be hard to surprise Tor-Ahdi. Tykar seems to know every word spoken, every act planned in Saadi-*Sur*. That is why every measure we have taken to trap him has always failed."

Ki-Gor had listened thoughtfully to the discussion, but since he was a guest, he ventured no opinions of his own. He did not miss the uncomfortable tension which held the group at the suggestion that spies were at work within the palace.

"Let us continue with our meal." Suba said heavily, and her glance was sufficient to jolt the serving men into activity. It was evident Suba knew she was being betrayed and the knowledge hurt her deeply.

TAANEE spoke up then with a suggestion clearly meant to lighten the queen's mood. "Perhaps our new champion could advise us," she said with a smile. Answering smiles showed on the faces of the women at the thought of any man being able to advise them on state matters.

Suba regarded him as she would a clumsy, but amusing pet. "What do you say to that, Ki-Gor?" she asked good-humoredly.

"Why, yes I can," the White Lord re-

turned with unexpected directness. "It is foolish to speak of fighting a war which all of you grant you can't win."

The women laughed. "He is like our men in more than looks," said Taanee, "frightened to death at the though of war. The only explanation of his showing today must be that the gods fought on our side." She turned maliciously to Ki-Gor, "And what would you have us do?"

"Talk out your problems with Tykar across a council fire," he declared. "Your ancestors swallowed their pride and made a treaty when war threatened to destroy them."

Suba halted Taanee's intended jibe with a raised hand.

"The situation is different today," she said. "Then both sides were of equal strength and both had suffered dreadful losses. Tykar thinks he holds the whip hand because he outnumbers us. His purpose is to destroy us, not see concessions. He covets the silver skulls, symbols of greatness in L'Gonda."

Ki-Gor saw an excellent opportunity to learn whether Suba had been raiding the border tribes for slaves.

"Then you must build up your strength so he cannot hope for an easy victory," he quickly stated. "No doubt you have blacks working for you. Train them to fight."

Suba's eyes sought N'Keeso. "Your small friend is one of the few blacks who has ever spent a day in Saadi-*Sur* and lived." There was no threat in her voice.

Ki-Gor decided to take a chance. "Well, if you don't keep black slaves, you apparently still have a great number of white ones." His finger stabbed toward several of the men lounging about the circle. "You could more than double your strength by making warriors of these fat pets of yours."

The men stared wide-eyed at Ki-Gor. Many of the women caught their breath. Suba had straightened, all friendliness gone from her.

"You go too far," she said after a moment. "Such a speech can cost you your head."

Ki-Gor was not to be faced down. "I only speak the truth. If your men were warriors, Tykar would think long before attacking. You asked my advice and I give it. You either stand and fight together, or you die together!"

His flat assertion struck hard into them all. Men did not speak so to the women of Saadi-*Sur*. They waited for Suba to give the order which would silence the stranger permanently.

"The gods decreed the proper places of men and women in the beginning of time," the queen told Ki-Gor. "The gods made us the givers of life, and it was but natural that they decreed that women, not men should be the ruling class. We give life, so it is our responsibility to direct the living. For the same reason, women alone have the right to make war. How can a man presume to take the life which he cannot create"?

In his wanderings, Ki-Gor had encountered many oddly ordered societies, but never before one in which the men were reduced to such useless drones. And to his surprise, he found Suba's quickly spoken logic none to easy to answer. How could he hope with a few words to alter beliefs drummed into these people by their priests from childhood?

"The men of Tor-Ahdi bear arms," Ki-Gor pointed out. "Are your men less than them?"

"You see in them what happens when the commands of the gods are broken," Suba said grimly. "Those dangoes are spawn of men who rebelled against the rule of our ancestors. That is why the hate between us will live forever."

And as she talked, Ki-Gor for the first time understood the bitter rivalry between Saadi-*Sur* and Tor-Ahdi. Long ago when the proportion of men to women had been even greater than today the men had risen against their women masters. They had suffered great losses, lived in the jungle like hunted animals until they learned the art of war.

Then because they had only the few women whom they had been able to capture or persuade to side with them, they had turned to stealing black women. Through the generations they grew stronger, while *Sur* deteriorated. In a final attempt to conquer the outcasts, *Sur* had precipitated the war which exhausted them both and ended in the signing of the treaty of perpetual peace.

They had lived in armed truce until

Tykar came to power. This shrewd, unscrupulous leader hungered to be known as the man who had humbled the Amazons.

"I explain this to you," said Suba, "because you have not learned our ways. But now you know, and never again will you speak of remaking *Sur* in the mold of our enemy. Henceforth, you will abide by our customs and especially will you never again carry any weapons, except the small dagger which men are allowed to use for eating."

Ki-Gor inclined his head respectfully, a half smile on his lips.

"You have been most kind and generous, Suba," he said. "Worry not that I will cause trouble. Helene, N'Geeso and I must leave tomorrow as we have a long journey yet before us."

Suba pulled a platter of antelope roast close and drew her knife. With a few deft slices, she cut herself a large portion.

"You will never leave Saadi-*Sur*," she said quietly. "None of you."

SHE waited a moment as though expecting an outburst from the White Lord. Across the room Helene and N'Geeso stiffened, their eyes darting in swift concern to Ki-Gor. They watched to take their cue from him.

The White Lord was too wise to show resistance. He knew that if Suba chose this time to tell them they were prisoners, then she had made adequate provisions to quell any trouble they started. The heavy guard at each entrance to the chamber was assembled for more than mere show. As though Ki-Gor's serene acceptance of her edict made her uneasy, Suba was impelled to a further show of authority.

With her knife, she gestured at the platter of fruits and nuts before the jungle man. "Eat!" she said. "You can begin by learning it is forbidden for our men to eat meat."

With a mild chuckle, Ki-Gor picked up a handful of nuts. Helene and the pygmy relaxed.

When the meal was over and the guests began leaving, guards appeared to show Helene and N'Geeso to their quarters. Suba laid a restraining hand on Ki-Gor. "I would speak to you privately," she told him. When he frowned, she added, "These two can await you in Helene's rooms. You will find we aren't harsh here. You may visit together all you wish."

When they were alone, Suba led him to a room more richly furnished than any he had seen. She unbuckled her sword, took off her metal corselet and stood before him.

"You see, I trust you," she said. "I am unarmed and the nearest guard is three rooms away."

Her firm, curved body was little concealed by her silver breast-cups and her narrow, tight-wrapped loin cloth. She threw her head back, watching him closely as she ran her fingers through her hair to loosen it.

"I am not like Tykar," he returned, showing more interest in his surroundings than in her. "In my land, a man who would harm a woman is beneath scorn."

"You're like no man I've ever known." Suba said softly.

She hesitated. "If I speak sternly to you before the others, you must not resent it. You must understand that my public actions often are different from my personal desires, and because you are still an outsider, I must be doubly careful."

Her dark eyes, now warm and alive, caught and held his glance.

She began to move toward him, her body swaying slightly, with a sensuous, dreamy languor. Ki-Gor regarded her with confusion, a puzzled look in his eyes. He shifted his feet uneasily.

"I was pleased to find that you really don't mind remaining here," she continued. "When you did not protest, I realized you were a more knowing man than you let on."

"Perhaps I merely realized you had armed guards jammed into every doorway," suggested Ki-Gor, feeling a touch of uneasiness at her tone.

Suba laughed and walked toward him.

"You tease me," she said, "with that straight face of yours. But you will never be sorry for staying here. Life for you will be easy and good, and there are many rewards I can give you."

Out of sight of her subjects, with her war gear laid aside Suba was a vibrantly beautiful woman. Her voice and manner seemed to alter.

"Yes?" he said. "One called Vion also wished to give me a reward today."

"What?" she snapped, obviously surprised that he should know and use that name.

"He tried to stab me because of some notion I would cause him to lose your favor."

Suba registered no embarrassment at Ki-Gor's obvious meaning. The White Lord at first couldn't tell whether she was pleased or angered, but he suspected that she was rather flattered that Vion would kill for her. Then, remembering that Ki-Gor watched her, her face hardened.

"By the gods," she said harshly, "he'll be punished for that. Never fear, he'll give you no further trouble."

Ki-Gor was amused by her assurance of protection.

"He's been punished enough," he stated, "and once you assure him his place in your affections is safe, there'll be no trouble."

SHE stood very close to Ki-Gor now. The fragrance of her hair, the warm woman-scent of her smooth skin was in his nostrils. She reached out to touch his arms, her hands sliding upwards over their muscled hardness to his broad, powerful shoulders.

"Come now," she laughed, "don't let Vion worry you. I believe you are jealous of him yourself—or is it that you still tease me?" She misunderstood the purpose of Ki-Gor's words entirely. "From now on, my Ki-Gor, you are the only one."

Ki-Gor knew little of women. He was bewildered to find that his attempt to get over to Suba the idea that he had no interest in her had failed. The queen could not conceive of any man rejecting her. All her life men had been at her beck and call.

As he realized this, Ki-Gor saw how dangerous was the ground he trod. If he angered Suba, she was barbaric enough to wreak a swift and terrible revenge not merely on him, but also on Helene and N'Geeso.

"You are a beautiful woman, Suba, and very desirable," he began tensely, meaning to explain later that he was bound in marriage to Helene for so long as he lived.

But Ki-Gor had no opportunity to finish Suba waited to hear no more than the compliment, and then with a small cry of triumph, she pressed against him, her mouth hungrily closing his lips. She clung to him, her arms tight about his neck, her body burning into him.

Ki-Gor started to draw away. His hands went up to pull her arms from his neck. But no man of flesh and blood could have failed to be swayed by Suba's passionate embrace. Her lips against his were seeking, demanding, and the insistent, shifting pressure of her nearly naked body cried out to him. The hot thrust of blood through his veins, however involuntary, was a madness that momentarily overpowered his will.

With a savage half-snarl more of pain than pleasure, his great arms went around her, jerked her already yielding form against him with a smothering tightness.

It was several moments before the increasingly excited voice calling outside the door penetrated their consciousness. It was a guard calling the queen. Ki-Gor heard the guard first, and it served to bring him to himself with a shock. He released Suba, suddenly thankful for the interruption now that his mind worked once again.

But the queen clung to him a bit longer, as though unwilling to have the outside world intervene. He unfastened her arms and pushed her away. The dark fire of her eyes devoured him, and not until he shoved her toward the door did she collect herself.

And even then, she swore, "If this disturbance be for some unimportant matter,

I'll have that cursed guard flayed alive." She flung open the door. "Well?" she demanded.

A dozen guards were crowded outside. They were so distraught her angry glance went unnoticed. An unintelligible clamor of voices broke out until she silenced them, told the woman nearest her to speak.

"There's been bloodshed in the palace!" the guard cried. "The two outlanders, Helene and N'Geeso, were attacked as they started to enter the woman's quarters. The woman, Helene, is gone, disappeared! The small man lies wounded and unconscious."

Ki-Gor heard the words and for a second was too staggered to move. Then with a face like death, he leaped past Suba and grabbed the guard with hands that made her cringe in pain.

"Where is she? Who did this thing?" he roared. "Speak before I choke the life from you!"

"We know nothing," she said, paling. "There are marks of struggle in the rooms and in the hall, but no sign of the woman. And no one passed the guards in the halls or at the entrances to the palace."

"Impossible!" thundered Ki-Gor.

The woman, fearful of what this madman might do, sought to calm him.

"Perhaps the small black man can tell us when he wakes," she eagerly suggested. "He apparently fought like a lion and despite his wound broke away from them."

Ki-Gor spun to face Suba. The grim, blazing-eyed man she saw was a shock to her. The Queen of Saadi-*Sur* felt a tingle of fear and retreated a step before him. There was no escaping the suspicion in his face, a suspicion which had come sudden and unbidden out of the shameful memory that he had been with the queen at the very time when Helene was in peril.

"Did you do this?" he demanded. "Even though you're a woman, I'll break you in my hands like an egg shell if you have harmed Helene."

FOR the first time in her life, Suba afraid of a man. The fact that a dozen of her guards stood behind him and he was unarmed had no bearing on the matter. His voice held a chill which gripped her heart.

"No, no!" she denied. "This is not my

doing. You must not think that." She put her hand to her head, trying to collect her thoughts. "It must be some new treachery of my enemies, but to what purpose I cannot see."

There was no arrogance in her, rather a bewildered meekness.

"Every step of the palace, of the whole city, will be searched." she assured him. "You will question the guards stationed near Helene's quarters yourself."

"Take me to N'Geeso," demanded the White Lord, unimpressed by her assurances.

He would know what to do when he had talked with the pygmy.

Suba readily complied with his request, and accompanied by the guards, they hurried to Helene's quarters where the pygmy still lay unconscious. An elderly woman was skillfully binding N'Geeso's wounds. He had two ugly gashes on one leg, another along his ribs and a great welt on his forehead.

N'Geeso moaned as he began to rouse. His eyes flickered open. Then as his senses returned, he twisted violently, lashed out with his arms, thinking he was still fight-

ing for his life. Ki-Gor held him, soothed him with his voice.

"What happened, N'Geeso?" asked the jungle man, trying to curb his wild impatience. "Where's Helene?"

"We were helpless," mumbled the little chieftain disconnectedly. "Tried to fight ...guards took our knives away when we left banquet...said was Suba's orders."

Ki-Gor glared up at the queen. She had, indeed, ordered that none of them were to carry more than the small daggers used for eating, and in taking away Helene's and N'Geeso's hunting knives, the guards had not supplied them with the smaller weapons.

"Who did it?" Ki-Gor asked desperately.

"Guard left us at door," N'Geeso said weakly. "When we opened it, room was dark...came at us all sides...couldn't see." He groaned at a sweep of pain through his head.

He told how he had tried to protect Helene, but had been felled with a club. It was confused in his mind, that swift, terrible struggle in utter darkness. He had rolled about on the floor, while they tried to kill him with both clubs and swords.

The pillow had saved his life. He had caught it up to protect himself and feeling their swords slash through it, the assassins thought they had finished him. A club blow delivered at the same instant had knocked him unconscious.

"I don't know, I don't know," N'Geeso returned miserably to the White Lord's continuing deluge of questions.

Had they killed Helene, or did she lie badly wounded in some hidden recess of the palace at this very moment? There was no trace of any secret entrance into the room and yet the guards swore no one had passed them. Like a red tide, suspicion flooded up in the White Lord.

Who but Suba among these barbaric people held any grudge against Helene? Who but the queen could plan and carry through such an attack in the heavily guarded palace?

The queen had held him in her rooms while her only rival for his affection was kidnapped. He had rejected both N'Geeso's and Tal's warnings, had acted like soft clay in Suba's hands when she confessed her feelings toward him. He was convinced this was the queen's bloody work. Sick with disgust and rage, he came to his feet. "This is your doing," he snarled, "and you'll tell me where she is!"

With a powerful sweep of his arms, he flung two women from his way, leaped at Suba. Her scream turned the room into pandemonium. The guards crowded to protect their queen, certain he meant to slay her.

But for all their strength and training, he tore them away from her like children, plunged through their massed bodies in blind rage. Suba turned then and ran into the hall, crying for more guards, and women warriors poured to the aid of their comrades. They swarmed over him, smothering him with their very weight and still he fought on toward the queen. A shattering blow from behind with an unlighted torch finally dropped him. The last sound he heard was Suba shouting that he was not to be slain.

V

HELENE was stumbling with weariness by the time they reached the foothills dotted with thorn threes and milkwoods. Her bruised, aching body cried out for rest after five days hard travel through the steaming jungle, but if she dared lag for a moment, she was brutally jerked forward by the rope attached to her bound wrists.

Though the only words the four men addressed her were threats, she knew they were taking her to Tor-Ahdi. They spoke repeatedly of the reward which would be theirs for bringing her to Tykar.

Helene remembered going into her room with N'Geeso. There was a sudden movement in the darkness, then something had exploded against her head. When she awakened, she was bound and gagged with a hood drawn over her face. She was being carried along a twisting path snarled with brush and overhanging leaves. When the hood and gag were removed, it was dawn and she found that her captors were the four men of Tor-Ahdi. She was too weary to think any further on the matter.

But she was sustained by the knowledge that Ki-Gor hadn't been taken. Her strength was her overpowering faith in her mate. She felt also N'Geeso must have escaped, otherwise he would have

been brought along with her. N'Geeso would furnish Ki-Gor with the clues he needed.

The dusky warriors brought her in late afternoon into a fern-choked canyon. This was the entrance to Tykar's jungle stronghold. Guards stood in pairs every hundred yards along the winding way. Helene could understand how long ago the rebel men had been able to defy the women warriors of Saadi-*Sur*. A small force could indefinitely stand off an infinitely superior army in this cramped defile.

A mile further on the canyon opened on a broad, grassy area completely shut in by high, granite cliffs. Tor-Ahdi lay at the far end of the valley, and from a distance, it looked like a hundred other native villages. In its dark, timeless way, Africa had claimed this village for its own.

Black men came out of the thatch houses, women left the corn and tuber patches which they worked. Children deserted their games to watch the approach of the woman prisoner. Helene's exhaustion was a merciful shield against their taunts, their sneering faces. She was only vaguely aware of being led into a smelly hut, placed in the care of two black women.

For two days the only persons she saw were those stolid, brawny women, naked but for the meager hide aprons suspended from a string worn around their waists. Then the third day they led her, still bound at the wrists, to a stream of water which flowed near the village. They forcibly stripped off her leopard skin halter and shorts and bathed her.

They tried to dress her in nothing more than a skimpy apron such as they wore and were enraged when she fought them like a wildcat, insisting she be given back her own garments. Helene guessed that she was being prepared to be brought before Tykar, and no matter if they killed her for resisting, she would never go before him in that state of undress. The women were forced to give way to her, because they were afraid to mar her beauty by mistreating her. They warned her, however, that they would have their revenge once the king was through with her.

Tykar's abode was a large, rambling warren of thatch rooms in the center of the village. He held court not in the house, but on the open square which it faced. Helene was brought into this square and forced to wait while he settled various disputes and minor matters brought before him by his subjects.

Though he and his guards affected the same glittering war gear as the women of Saadi-Sur, the vast majority of the throng looked like typical Bantu tribesmen. Tykar sat cross-legged on a raised platform covered with lion and zebra skins. Behind him stood his major officers and councillors, who respectfully murmured advice on those infrequent times he solicited it. But at the front of the platform, ranged on either side of him were a dozen of his ebony-skinned wives, smirking and beaming as they basked in his reflected glory.

When her time came to be interviewed, Helene strode before Tykar with her head high, no sign of fear in her proud carriage. He had deliberately avoided noticing her until this moment. He sat now like a smug pagan idol, hunched forward so motionless that he hardly seemed to breathe, his loose, fat lips half-parted as his cruel eyes stared unblinkingly into hers.

Perhaps that first movement of his, when he raised a hand to the rough bandage over the remnants of his severed ear, was purely unconscious. But Helene felt it was his none-too-subtle way of letting her know she would pay for what her husband had done to him.

"Why have I been brought here like a slave?" she demanded. "I am not of Sur, nor am I an enemy of Tor-Ahdi. Take warning that I am no friendless woman whose mistreatment will go unavenged."

THE crowd stared at this woman who dared speak so boldly to their leader. Tykar merely smirked at Helene, then shoved upward to his feet.

"Look you, my warriors," he bellowed grandly, "at this red-haired prisoner. She is proof of our power, proof of the weakness of our enemies. I reached out my hand and plucked her from within the very walls of *Sur*."

An amazed murmur greeted his boast. He had given strict orders that nothing of Helene's story should be revealed beforehand.

"Hai!!" he chortled. "Your surprise is nothing to that felt by those cringing women. It is a sign that Tykar toys with

them, that when he chooses to say the word the might of Tor-Ahdi will sweep them from the earth."

A great cheer went up from the warriors and Tykar received it like a conqueror. Helene began to have her first inkling of the reason for her kidnapping.

"But there is more to it than that," he said, after he had quieted the blacks with outstretched arms. "By a miserable trick which took us off-guard, we were cheated on the Contest of Swords."

Then to Helene's astonishment, he told a face-saving story of his fight with Ki-Gor which showed the depth of the man's cunning. He explained how in the midst of the cleverly-contrived confusion, Suba had had a man leap out and challenge him. Thinking this was one of the soft men of Saadi-*Sur*, continued Tykar, he had held back, not wanting to slaughter the innocent fool. But the man had set upon him in a terrible and completely unexpected onslaught and struck him senseless, he declared, and not untill later did he learn that his opponent was one named Ki-Gor, a skilled killer brought her from the jungle outlands.

"His name is known to many of our new slaves," he stated indignantly. "Ask them of his prowess, and then you will see to what vile lengths your enemies will bend to slay your leader. Hear me!" he shouted. "I will kill this Ki-Gor for his part in the plot, but first I spit upon him, degrade him to show my contempt."

As he reached the climax of his carefully thought-out speech, he darted a pointing finger at Helene, his face twisted with savage pleasure.

"His cheating victory is salt in his mouth today," he cried. "He knows now I play with him like a lion does a lizard. I could have snatched him here, but deliberately I brought this woman—his wife! How better can I show my contempt than to use his woman as a slave, make a grovelling servant of her. Then when I choose, I will reach out for him—and with you at my side we will wreak our vengeance. Ki-Gor and Suba both will crawl to us on their knees before I am through."

Tykar knew how to inflame his warriors with the battle lust. He made them feel that with his leadership they were invincible. A vast tumult arose as over and over the crowd roared for him to lead them against the warrior-women.

"Soon, soon, my war-dogs," he promised, his eyes glittering with excitement, "there will be loot for all! The seven silver skulls!" And with an evil knowing look he pointed again to Helene. "And for every warrior, there will be a woman like this."

He made of Helene's slim, young beauty a symbol of the rewards which waited for those who would storm the walls of Saadi-Sur. She was sickened by the hungry, leering eyes of the surging mob of warriors.

Caught up in the wild excitement, Tykar was unwilling to let the matter end at this point. He decided this was the moment to sweep away the last lingering doubts of his followers that the assault on Saadi-Sur might not be the easy success he promised.

He would reveal to them the great weapon which would take them into the city in the first rush, which would make it unnecessary for them to suffer heavy losses scaling the walls.

This weapon was his proudest secret. He had gotten the idea from slaves who told how their tribes caught and tamed elephants. He had had a contingent of picked warriors and slaves trap two elephants and take them far back in the hills to train. Two days previously the long job had been completed and the great beasts brought into Tor-Ahdi. Knowing nothing of tame elephants, Tykar's people had no inkling of what their leader was about. Now he told them.

"There have been a few old women among you," he declared, "who counseled against war because they said we would be slaughtered trying to pass the walls. The rest of you believed in me. Now you may judge whether I am not a leader worthy of unquestioning confidence."

He ordered the elephants brought into the square by their handlers. While the great beasts were being brought through the village, he explained how they would be sent forward to smash in the gates before the women warriors could guess what they were about.

"We will pour through the opening," Tykar crowed, "and with our superior numbers, the battle will be over before the women can strike a blow."

THIS announcement was met with an ovation. The warriors watched with wondering eyes while the giant animals were led into the square and made to perform various tricks to show how well trained they were.

Helene was roughly pulled back against Tykar's platform by the two women assigned to watch her. In her turmoil, she paid little attention to the elephants. The beasts were no novelty to her. She had ridden elephants many times with Ki-Gor, and had seen them under his understanding guidance do tasks which put the few tricks of these black trainers to shame.

Her mind was occupied with the single aim of finding a way out of her predicament. She could read in Tykar's eyes the degradation in store for her. Death would be preferable to enduring the long days which it would take for Ki-Gor to reach her in this nearly impregnable stronghold.

Either she must get away immediately or she must find a way to destroy herself. The sheer forbidding cliffs which enclosed the valley told her that even if she got away from her guards the only way out of this hell-spot lay past the sentries in the canyon. And she knew on the darkest night a person couldn't successfully run that gauntlet.

The desperate girl's swirling thoughts were interrupted as one of the elephants was swung in close to the platform by his trainer. At a signal from the man on its head, the animal obediently trumpeted a salute to Tykar. Since the king had secretly visited the elephants during their training period, he wasn't startled by the fierce challenge. But his wives and councillors were unfamiliar with the beasts, and the animal's nearness combined with that shattering blast of sound struck panic into them.

Helene saw the men and women fling themselves from the platform. The crowd around her scattered in all directions, even the guards deserting their posts. The two women who had guarded her were among the first to flee, forgetting Helene in their fright.

In that moment a mad, wild idea born of utter hopelessness leaped full-blown into Helene's mind. If she could mount the elephant, dislodging its trainer, she might be able to run the beast out of the village and head it into the canyon. She would have to gamble on confusion and the blacks' fear of the creature to give her a few seconds to try and control the elephant. And if she failed—well, a swift death under the trampling feet was preferable to remaining Tykar's prisoner.

She gave herself no opportunity to weaken. Swift as thought, she raised her bound hands to the edge of the platform, took a quick, running step and threw her slim legs upward. She struck flat on the platform, rolled over once and came to her feet.

Before Tykar realized what Helene was about, she darted along the platform, dove outward and upward with all the strength in her lithe body. She knew she would have only one chance, so desperation lent added power to her muscles. She hit on her stomach, squarely on the elephant's shoulders.

She was half-stunned by the shock of the blow, but she remembered to sink her fingers into the loose, leathery hide. This momentary hold kept her from sliding off the animal until she could fling her legs wide, and scramble across the broad back. The startled trainer seated on the beast's head twisted about.

SHE plunged up to hit him solidly with her shoulder. The Bantu slave screamed as he toppled sideways, his arms scrabbling the air hopelessly as he went crashing to the ground. The elephant, frightened by the trainer's scream and the struggle on his back, spun about in an attempt to see whether some enemy was attacking. The beast's gigantic shoulders came against the platform, heaved it over like a brushpile. This chance move saved Helene from immediate recapture for Tykar was running forward to leap and drag her down when the platform under him was upended.

With the trainer dislodged, Helene flattened herself on the giant head, straining every muscle to keep her balance. The furiously trumpeting elephant started uncertainly toward the crowd, not frightened enough yet to be panicky, nor angry enough to be murderous.

But the running, screaming natives thought it was charging them and they fought each other to get out of the way.

The other beast, upset over its mate's behavior, was refusing to obey its trainer's commands. With her heart in her throat, Helene slid her legs down behind her vast mount's ears and sat up.

Helene dug her heels into the creature, urged it forward in Bantu, and the elephant broke into that shuffling, deceptively fast run of its species. She felt a sudden swell of elation. But the feeling was short-lived, for as they neared the thatch houses at the edge of the square, Helene found the beast would not respond to any of the commands she remembered hearing Ki-Gor use.

The elephant had broken into the run of its own accord and not because of her orders. It had been trained by one particular native, and now in the midst of this disorder, when that man's voice was missing, the animal acted for itself.

The elephant veered, missing one hut, but it scorned the open way between the structures and chose to drive its own path to freedom through the village. It smashed headon into the second hut, literally exploding the house under its tons of power. Then it was through the shower of splintered wood and thatch, and without the least slackening of stride thundered into the next hut.

Helene had the presence of mind to fling herself down before they struck the first hut. Even then the raking impact of the crashing roof tore her away from the elephant's head.

She had no chance to regain her balance or get set for the second shock. As the elephant burst against the second structure, Helene was flailed with slabs of brush and thatch. She was knocked from her swaying perch, spun downward to hit hard in the debris. Dazed and breathless, she lay still as the mountainous grey bulk drove out of sight through the over-hanging shambles.

Vaguely, she heard the enraged shouts of the blacks as they poured across the clearing towards her. No mercy was in that mob cry. They would rend her limb from limb. She tried to stand, but her stunned legs wouldn't hold her weight. On hands and knees she began to crawl feebly through the debris, instinctively seeking a corner where she could hide away from the anger-crazed blacks.

VI

THE woman guard unlocked the barred door, placed the platter of food on the floor beside Ki-Gor. She moved quickly, for despite the chains on his arms and legs, his chill, grey eyes, his unnatural immobility made her uneasy. She sensed the terrible, pent-up violence growing in this man.

The council, she thought, was right in urging that he be swiftly executed for daring to attack the queen. And Suba was wrong to stand against them. Loss of his wife affected him as a rotted tusk did an elephant. You could watch the madness from that inner pain grow in him day by day. It was a senseless danger to let him live. Yet Suba continued to coddle him. For instance, this new order allowing him to have visitors.

What a foolish idea to think that talk with other men would restore him. There were men enough in Saadi-Sur without the queen worrying about one who wouldn't look at her.

When she was a safe distance from Ki-Gor, she said disgustedly, "The queen has given permission for Tal to see you. He is outside now."

Ki-Gor, who hadn't even glanced at his food, stared at her silently. When he failed to reply or evidence any interest, she turned away angrily. She snarled down the hall at Tal, telling him he could come in if he would get any satisfaction out of talking to a stone image. She swung the door closed and locked it on the two men, too disgruntled to follow her customary habit of eavesdropping.

"Why do you come here?" Ki-Gor asked harshly.

Remembering how genial Ki-Gor had been at their first meeting Tal was taken aback. "You are a stranger and in trouble," he said, "I thought to be your friend."

The White Lord's laugh was an ugly, bitter thing. "Aye, Sur is a great place for friendliness. I saved your queen's life and she repaid me by murdering Helene."

Tal's face grew troubled. He stood indecisively a moment, then after an anxious glance over his shoulder, came close to the jungle man.

"I make no defense of Suba and her

women," he said. "Perhaps you forget how they regard me. I, too, know the feel of their chains." His voice dropped to a whisper. "That's why I mean to help you escape."

Ki-Gor rattled the chains on his wrists and his bleak glance went to the barred door. "Yes?" he said, obviously unimpressed by the thought of this slim, handsome youth getting him out of the cell and past Suba's guards.

Tal sensed his feelings and flushed with resentment. "By the gods, I should leave you here to rot," he swore. "Do not underestimate me because I lack your warrior's skill and your great strength. I have courage and cunning enough for us both."

Some of the woodenness left Ki-Gor's expression. "I meant no insult," he said wearily. "It is only that I realize the difficulty and the risk involved in an escape."

Not entirely mollified, Tal snapped at him, "Do you worry about difficulty and risk when I'm trying to lead you to where your wife is held?"

For a single dazed moment, Ki-Gor stared at the man. Then his hands shot out and gripped Tal with a speed and unconscious violence that frightened the man.

"You mean she lives? She's unhurt?"

"Yes!" gasped Tal, squirming with pain.

The jungle man released him. He was suddenly alive again, his mind quick and sure, the brooding shadows of madness gone from his eyes.

"Quick! How can you free me?" demanded Ki-Gor, and before Tal could answer, his mind had leaped again to Helene. "Is she in the palace? How well is she guarded? This time I will not spare them, women or not, if they stand in my way!"

"Wait," restrained Tal. "There is one condition attached to my helping you."

"Anything, anything," impatiently granted Ki-Gor.

Tal smiled. "Take me with you," he specified. "I, too, seek freedom from this accursed place. You must teach me to be a warrior, so I can return one day and teach these women a man's proper place."

There was respect and understanding in Ki-Gor then for this rebellious youth. "You will be a worthy comrade," he said.

Tal launched immediately into his plan. He took from his tunic a length of cord, concealed it under Ki-Gor's sleeping mat.

"When all is quiet tonight and the hall guards are drowsing," he explained, "drop one end of the cord out your window. I've stolen a hammer and chisel, and I'll slip outside the palace and tie them to the cord. You pull them up and hide them until tomorrow when I visit you. They are too bulky for me to try to smuggle in."

Some of the enthusiasm visibly left the White Lord. The men's quarter was locked at night and the halls of the palace were thick with guards. How could Tal hope to get outside the walls to smuggle him the tools?

"I'll get out the same way I often do to prowl the city or go outside the walls," Tal assured him, "through the drainage outlet from the pool. If I didn't know a trick or two, how else do you think I would have been outside to see them carry Helene away that night."

"Carry her away!" exclaimed Ki-Gor, realizing for the first time she wasn't held in the palace. "Where?"

"To Tor-Ahdi!" hissed Tal. "I was so close to Tykar's men they almost stumbled over me when the women lowered Helene from the top of the wall. It was well planned enough. There were at least a dozen women in on it."

KI-GOR trembled under the flooding shock of anger. Here was final proof of Suba's duplicity. Who else but the queen could carry through such a plan? She played a double game. She tried to mollify Tykar by handing him the dearest possession of the man who had humbled him, and at the same time, she thought to make Ki-Gor her own slave once his wife was out of the way.

"Helene in Tykar's hands," he repeated dumbly. "By the gods, I will repay this cruelty in kind. I will have vengeance for this though the whole Congo try to stop me."

"Tomorrow then," said Tal, ready to leave.

"Wait," urged Ki-Gor. "You understand we must take N'Geeso with us. Otherwise, Suba would vent her wrath on him."

Tal frowned. "Impossible," he declared. "With his leg wounds, he can't walk. We

will have race enough to run without trying to take a sick man with us."

N'Geeso had not been imprisoned. Wounded, he wasn't considered dangerous, so Suba had let him stay on in the men's quarter.

"And if in our escape you are wounded," Ki-Gor said softly, "you wish me to leave you to your death."

Tal swallowed heavily. He had not viewed Ki-Gor's display of loyalty to N'Geeso in that light.

"You give me my first lesson in being a warrior and a friend," he said humbly. "We will take him, of course."

That night Tal was as good as his word. Ki-Gor drew up the chisel and hammer, thankfully noting that his new friend had wrapped them in cloth to prevent their clinking against the wall. When he opened the cloth, he found Tal had also included a dagger. He used the blade to slit the end of his single cushion, and after stowing the instruments inside, he used a small piece of cord to close the opening.

Through the dragging hours of the next day, Ki-Gor forced himself to sit stolidly in his cell, afraid to betray any nervousness for fear of attracting the guard's attention. His tension had grown to almost unbearable proportions when the evening waned and still Tal had not come. Then he heard footsteps in the hall and the guard's angry voice lecturing Tal.

The door grated open and the man meekly backed into the cell, nodding his head at the flow of abuse, apparently afraid to say a word in his defense. The guard, a bulky drayhorse of a woman, was disgruntled because he had disturbed her meal and also because she would hardly get back to eating before she would have to come let him out again. It was against the rules for visitors to enter the prison section after dark.

"It won't happen again," Tal assured her weakly. He fumbled with a silver bracelet on his arm. "Perhaps this will repay you for the trouble I've caused you." He held the bracelet close to him timidly, as though afraid she would refuse so unworthy a gift.

Her grumbling sputtered to a stop, but with the scowl still on her face, she stepped closer to him. "Eh?" she growled. "Let's have a look." She snatched the trinket roughly, half turned to get the dim light from the window better on it.

Tal's hands moved with the swiftness of a striking snake. He snatched a looped cord from within his tunic, dropped it over the woman's head and leaped behind her. With his first tug, he drew it so tight she couldn't scream.

She dropped the bracelet, tried to spin and grab her assailant. She was a heavy, powerful woman and, with the feel of the noose about her neck, terror gave her added strength. Where the average native would have brought her to her knees within seconds, Tal was inexperienced in the deadly handling of a strangler's cord and her savage exertions flustered him.

Ki-Gor, chained helplessly to the walk, felt his heart come into his throat. He could see his opportunity to escape slipping away. The woman had actually managed to half-turn and get her hands on Tal. The two grappled and staggered, and it was plain that if she could hold out a fraction longer she would get free.

But in her maddened efforts, she got her feet entangled with Tal's. They toppled to the floor, rolling and fighting. Ki-Gor saw the fall had torn the cord from his friend's hands. The woman scrambled to her knees, fighting him off with one arm,. while with the other she clawed to loosen the throttling noose.

Ki-Gor strained against his chains, his face carved with agony as he realized Tal was beaten. The soft-muscled man of Sur was no match for the guard. The woman ripped away the cord from her red, swollen neck, gasping breath into her tortured lungs. In a moment, she would be able to cry for aid.

IN PURE animal desperation, Tal threw himself at the woman again, beating and clawing at her. She threw him off, stepped back a quick step and reached for her sword. As she swept the blade free, her arm came back for a terrible blow that would literally decapitate the man. She was making odd, painful sounds, trying to summon her fellow guards, but her bruised throat was still too paralyzed to form the words.

It was then Ki-Gor saw his chance, In her excitement the woman had stepped too close to him. Her sword arm was just

within his reach. His steel fingers closed about her wrist, and in one merciless surge of power, he lifted her by the single arm and flung her back against the wall. The blade spun from her grasp and Ki-Gor's fingers were about her throat.

His blazing grey eyes stared into hers and all color was gone from her face. "One sound and you die!" he snarled, and she knew he spoke the truth. This blonde giant was no weakling man of *Sur*. He could and would kill her with a single twist of his hands.

"Spare me!" she croaked, and the hulking body which had man-handled so many prisoners learned what it was to tremble with fear.

Ki-Gor swiftly tied her hand and foot with the cord hidden in the cushion. He used the cloth in which the tools had been wrapped to gag her. Then afraid that her long absence would bring other guards, he shook Tal from his daze, thrust the chisel and hammer into his hands.

They used portions of the cushion to muffle the blows. Severing the primitive iron bracelet welded around his right wrist consumed the greatest amount of time for he had to let Tal hammer it loose. But the other clumsily welded bonds fell apart easily after that because Ki-Gor could wield the hammer.

Ki-Gor took the guard's sword, gave Tal her dagger to conceal in his tunic. "How many guards do we have to pass to get out of here?" he asked.

"There's one down the hall and two at the door leading out of the prison section."

The shadows were growing dense in the cell. Tal had selected the time well. Torches had been lit in the halls, but since the present guards would be going off duty within a few minutes, they left to their successors the duty of placing torches in the cells.

"Hurry down the hall and tell the woman that something awful is wrong with the prisoner in here and that the guard needs her immediately," Ki-Gor directed. "Just babble excitedly and run back this way before she can question you."

Tal didn't have to feign the excitement. Seeing him wild-eyed and almost incoherent as he rushed up and babbled his message, the woman couldn't fail to think that something terrible was happening in Ki-Gor's cell. She rushed after him calling questions, but he darted into the room crying to her to hurry.

The "desperately sick" prisoner's hands caught her as she entered the door. The struggle was brief and almost soundless. Tal wonderingly watched the ease with which Ki-Gor flattened the muscular woman face down on the cushion to smother any outcry, tied her with the last of the cord, then gagged her.

Ki-Gor kept both swords himself, sent Tal ahead to engage the attention of the two remaining guards. He noted that his friend was pale and shaken, so told him not to try to talk, but merely to walk up to the women and topple over as if he had fainted. That would engage them long enough for the White Lord to get into action.

The prison hall was deserted as Tal went down it. Ki-Gor waited until his accomplice turned into the intersecting hall where the barred exit was. Then he ran swiftly after him, paused at the turn until he heard the surprised exclamations which told him Tal had slumped to the floor.

No leopard could have stalked its prey more silently than did the White Lord. The women had their backs to him, one of them kneeling with her hand on Tal's brow.

"What's wrong with the dango?" she said unsympathetically. "His skin is cold as death, yet the pulse in his throat flutters wildly. And see how his limbs tremble."

Ki-Gor was immediately behind the woman who had not troubled to kneel down.

"Don't worry about him," he said quietly.

The woman spun, eyes wide with astonishment. Ki-Gor's blade touched her lightly on the chest. Her hand plunged toward her sword.

His sword point bit a quarter-inch through her skin. "I'll kill you if you move," he warned with abrupt fierceness.

His tone froze them both and the trickle of blood on the nicked guard reinforced his words. He snatched her sword from its scabbard, told Tal to disarm the kneeling woman.

"Now march ahead of me to my cell."

Ki-Gor didn't trouble to bind them. He

shoved them into the room, bolted the heavy door. It was nearly time for the night guards to come on duty. Tal and he raced down the hall, flung open the door and fled. As they darted into a side corridor, Tal took the lead, putting his familiarity with the palace to good use to bring them to the men's quarter without encountering more guards.

"Won't some of the men betray us?" asked Ki-Gor as they entered the section.

"They're gathered for the evening meal in the banquet room beyond the pool," explained Tal. "With luck, N'Geeso should be the only person in the rooms."

N'Geeso's door stood open. The pygmy sat braced against the wall, his injured leg straightened before him, a bandage about his head. Relief came to his grey features when he saw Ki-Gor. Cool and nerveless in action himself, the little chieftain had lived through a thousand tortures while wondering what was happening to the White Lord.

"Wah!" he grunted, his hard eyes inspecting Ki-Gor. "You're unhurt and here I've had you dead a hand of times." He snorted disgustedly to cover his true feelings.

Ki-Gor grinned. "You can tell me of your disappointment later," he said. "Save your breath now for fighting." He knew how it must hurt N'Geeso to feel he was a burden. He thrust an extra sword and a dagger hilt-first at the pygmy. "And expect no sympathy from me for your few cuts," he added severely. "I know you can fight better on one leg than other men can on two."

N'GEESO chuckled. He reached out and took the sword. Then abruptly his horror-filled glance drove past Ki-Gor toward the door.

"He's locking us in!" he shouted.

Ki-Gor spun in time to see Vion, the queen's discarded favorite, take a quick step in from the hall and grab the door. His hate-carved face proclaimed his purpose. All he had to do was swing the door shut, drop the bar, and he had the three of them safely caged until the guards came.

And there was no chance for them to reach him.

"Trapped!" Vion cried in triumph, as he started to pull the door shut. "Trapped like jackals!"

But his gloating words died in his throat, died in a choking rush of blood. He did succeed in banging the door closed, but he was no longer interested in or capable of dropping the bar. Vion was staggering back across the hall, plucking with dying hands at the dagger lodged in his jugular. Ki-Gor had thrown that knife with the speed of light.

N'Geeso had gotten awkwardly to his feet by the time Ki-Gor turned back to him. Tal stood dazedly in the middle of the room, still unable to believe what he had seen. Ki-Gor took a single look at the way N'Geeso supported himself and he reached out and lifted the pygmy in his arms.

"You'll have your fill of limping later," he said, cutting off the little chieftain's protests. "Get moving, Tal," he commanded. "Can't you hear the bay of the pack." And indeed there was a great hue and cry coming nearer to the men's quarter. Their escape had been discovered.

Yet Tal remained rooted to the floor, his heart pounding so violently that his breast fluttered with its runaway beat. His breathing was swift and shallow. He was terrified, actually close to fainting.

Both Ki-Gor and N'Geeso read the danger signals and understood their cause. Despite his aspirations to be a warrior, Tal had always been sheltered from bloodshed and danger. None of his previous escapades had been too serious, and now, for the first time, he found himself in a touch and go race where his life was at stake.

He had planned this escape carefully and well. But once in action, he found he neither felt nor behaved like the heroic figure he had pictured himself to be. He had rehearsed in his day-dreams a hundred times the easy, efficient manner in which he would dispose of Ki-Gor's guard, boldly get Ki-Gor out of the prison, lead him from the palace. But how different actuality was from dreams.

Ki-Gor and N'Geeso had seen this same reaction in young warriors in their first battle. Though Tal didn't realize it, actually he had behaved with real courage for one brought up in his circumstances. He had the makings of a brave man, but at

the moment, drastic measures were needed to bring him to his senses.

As Ki-Gor stepped close to Tal, N'Geeso reached out and struck the youth across the back with the flat of his sword. "Get us out of here quick or you'll never live to be captured," threatened the pygmy. Again his sword crashed across Tal's shoulders. "I'll spit you like a pig on a spear."

Tal jerked away, terrified as he glimpsed N'Geeso's scowling visage. He was convinced this N'Geeso would kill him as callously as Ki-Gor had slain Vion.

"I'm all right," he stuttered. "I'll do it. Don't kill me!"

He scuttled out the door, with Ki-Gor pressing behind him. They darted into the large chamber housing the pool. It was brightly illuminated by the flare of wall torches. Excited voices from the eating room just beyond the bath told them that the men were aware something was wrong in the palace.

Tal raced to one end of the pool, leaped into the waist-deep water. Ki-Gor watched him anxiously, suddenly wondering if the flustered youth had led them into a blind alley. Tal fumbled with a grating, every second stretching into an hour as his clumsy hands tried to do his bidding.

VII

WHEN Tal finally swung the grating open, a square, black hole was revealed just large enough for a man to enter on his hands and knees. By holding his head up as he crawled, he would be able to breathe, for there was a narrow air space between the surface of the water and the top of the drainage outlet.

But entering that cramped hole for the first time would have brought a shudder to any man. The prospect was far from pleasing to either Ki-Gor or N'Geeso. If there was a slight increase in the flow of water from the pool or any deviation in the level of the floor or roof, they would drown in the darkness. In an ancient drainage ditch like this, a cave-in could have occurred since Tal last negotiated it.

They had no choice, however. They had delayed so long, it was now their only chance to escape the guards. Ki-Gor lowered N'Geeso into the water, then jumped down beside him.

"Lead the way," he told Tal.

As the man crawled from sight, Ki-Gor helped the pygmy into the opening. Despite his bad leg, N'Geeso would have to go it alone. While waiting for the pygmy to splash out of sight, Ki-Gor heard running footsteps. The men came pouring from the eating room to learn what the excitement was about.

The White Lord slid into the hole. He had the presence of mind to hook one foot in the iron grating and softly pull it closed behind him. Before he had gone a yard, he had to fight off a feeling of revulsion caused by the touch of slimy water growths.

He lost all sense of time and direction in that blackness. His very ignorance of the length of drainage outet gave him a trapped feeling. Moving through the slime, with the only sound the eerie rush of the water, he wondered if he hadn't blundered into some intersecting channel which Tal had neglected to warn him about.

His size made his progress slow. He was barely able to wedge his shoulders between the two walls. His two smaller companions quickly outdistanced him, and not being able to hear them splashing along ahead added to his worry that he had turned into some intersecting channel.

Finally, when he had almost given up hope of ever getting above ground again, he abruptly realized the wet, slippery stone was no longer pressing against his head and shoulders.

He looked up out of the blackness around him and saw the night sky glittering with stars. With a gasp of relief, he cleared the water from his nose and throat. He had emerged in an open drainage ditch. As he straightened, he saw his two friends along the edge of the ditch. Behind them loomed the walls of *Sur*. They were safely outside the city.

"We grew worried, Ki-Gor," whispered N'Geeso. "Tal was getting ready to go back and look for you."

"Wah!" replied Ki-Gor. "I am not made for such narrow places."

It warmed him to hear that Tal had been willing to make a return trip to see if he had been caught in the channel. He

reached out and tapped his knuckles against the youth's chest. "Thank you, Tal. You will make a warrior."

Tal's voice was low and ashamed. "No," he said miserably, "I'm no good I was crazy with fear back there. I failed you. I'm a coward."

Ki-Gor gave a low laugh. "You expect too much from yourself. Every lion cub shows nervousness on his first stalk. Don't you see that already you learn to control yourself?"

N'Geeso maneuvered his sore legs into an easier position. His uncertain movements betrayed his weakness. He had made the long crawl more by strength of will than muscle.

"But you'll never trust me again" protested Tal.

"You'll never be that way again," N'Geeso assured him. "And don't take seriously my pig-sticking threats. I've jogged many a young warrior back to his senses like that."

"No coward would have ever had the nerve to make the first trip through this channel," pointed out Ki-Gor. "I was as scared as a white-ruffled monkey with one foot in a crocodiles mouth."

The thought of Ki-Gor being afraid brought a laugh from Tal. Finding that he wasn't disgraced in their eyes his volatile spirits swiftly rose. Though men were seldom allowed to travel outside Saadi-Sur, Tal knew the direction of Tor-Ahdi and some information about the countryside that would be useful.

Travel by night was slow and dangerous in the jungle but they had to put as much distance as possible between them and Saadi-Sur before daylight. Ki-Gor hoisted N'Geeso to his back and soon located a trail leading toward Tor-Ahdi. Throughout the night they pressed forward with the jungle man resting himself at intervals by letting N'Geeso limp along with Tal's assistance. By dawn they were all stumbling with fatigue and N'Geeso, who had endured the hours of torture without a murmur, was ashen-faced and feverish.

The White Lord led them off the trail, keeping to the bed of a stream to hide their spoor, and stopped at last in a thicket of camwoods. Despite his weariness, he drove himself to take the precautions which long experience had taught him were necessary before a man could sleep in relative safety from either animal or human hunters.

He cut lengths of liana of a uniform size, climbed with them into a tree and wove a firmly secured vine netting between two branches. He floored this platform of vines with broad, green leaves and over the leaves spread freshly cut grass. Next he fashioned a ladder. Then with N'Geeso clinging to his back, he laboriously climbed the ladder, deposited the pygmy in the tree house.

TAL was amazed at the manner in which the White Lord created the house swiftly and skillfully out of whatever materials lay closest at hand. And looking up from the jungle floor, Tal found the swaying platform blended so perfectly into the green background of vines and branches that one's eye slid over it.

When his two friends were settled, Ki-Gor erased their tracks from the ground around the tree and had Tal draw up the ladder. Then the White Lord trotted back to the stream, moved slowly along the bank, searching the ground for the dull grey leaves of the n'kia plant.

It was a half hour before he found a bed of the tiny leaves. With his sword, he dug up the pinkish n'kia roots and washed them clean of dirt. Next, he located a gigantic baobab tree and cut two yellow sap boils from its scaly bark. From a vine on the same tree he cut two hollow gourds.

After wrapping the n'kia roots and the sap boils in separate leaves and fastening them to a thong about his waist, Ki-Gor returned to the river. He sliced the top from one of the gourds and filled it with water.

When he got back to the tree house, both N'Geeso and Tal lay with their eyes closed. Tal's relaxed body, his even breathing showed that he was deep in exhausted sleep. But despite N'Geeso's tightly closed lids, it took Ki-Gor only a glance to know that the pygmy was faking.

N'Geeso's grey pallor, his set jaw, and his too-swift breathing betrayed the fever and pain which tortured him. The night's exertions had been too much for a wounded man to stand, and though the

pygmy hadn't once murmured, Ki-Gor knew at what cost he had lasted out the trip. Because he did not wish to be a burden or in any way delay Ki-Gor, the little chieftain was trying now to conceal his condition.

Understanding this, Ki-Gor's face softened. He sat down beside the pygmy, braced the water-filled gourd against his leg, and unwrapped the n'kia roots and the three sap boils. Curious as to what the White Lord was doing, N'Geeso cautiously raised one eyelid. Then, sick as he was, he gave a disgusted grunt and sat up.

"May Gimshai, the Stealer of Souls, curse me," he declared weakly, "if you aren't worse than any prying wife. Would I not ask for your evil potions, if I needed them."

"No," said Ki-Gor with a smile, "you wouldn't.

"You have all the makings of a witch-doctor," grumbled the pygmy, but readily, almost eagerly, he swallowed the milky fluid from the sap boils which Ki-Gor cut open. The potent natural medicine would kill his pain and bring healing rest

Within three minutes, his lids wavered shut and he slept. His taut muscles relaxed and his breathing became more regular. The calloused, blunt-fingered hand which he put on Ki-Gor's knee even while he grumbled told the actual gratitude he felt.

Ki-Gor now took the small gourd and cut it in half. He placed one of the crude bowls thus formed between his knees, cut into it the pinkish n'kia root. He added water and shredded the roots into a pulp with his sword hilt. He spread this concoction over N'Geeso's wounds like a poultice.

Only when he completed tending for the pygmy did he drink deeply from the water gourd and stretch his exhausted body on the edge of the platform. Because of his torturing thoughts of Helene, sleep came to him slowly, and when finally he dozed off, his face was turned toward Tor-Ahdi. While he slept, his hand never relaxed its grip on the unsheathed sword at his side.

Shortly after noon, Ki-Gor roused and changed the poultices on N'Geeso. The pygmy didn't stir. Drugged as he was, he would sleep on through the day and the night. The White Lord stared off into the jungle with restless, worried eyes

Tal's quiet voice took him unawares. "Go on without us, Ki-Gor. It is unfair to Helene that we should hold you here." It was plain Tal had watched him long enough to read his unguarded thoughts.

"Sleep while you can," the jungle man said gruffly. "You will have troubles enough without lying awake thinking up new ones."

"Don't try to put me off," Tal told him. "I see things clearer today than I did last night I realize now I would be no use to you in rescuing Helene. Perhaps some day I can fight beside you, but right now I would be only an added responsibility."

Tal's glance touched the sleeping N'Geeso. "And no matter how magical the medicines you prepare for the Small One, he won't be able to walk on that leg again for several days. N'Geeso and I can both best serve you by staying behind. You can tell me how to tend him, and as soon as he can travel, we will follow you"

There was no disputing the truth of Tal's words. The small advantage which would be gained by having Tal and N'Geeso to help him was far outweighed by the seriousness of allowing any further time to elapse before trying to reach Helene. And Tal could care for the pygmy as well as Ki-Gor.

N'Geeso would be furious, because he realized the danger into which Ki-Gor went, and he felt the White Lord would need a friend at his side. But he would be far away by the time the pygmy learned the truth. In his inexperience, Tal did not grasp the terrible chance which the White Lord would be taking, and it was with no thought of escaping danger himself, that he advised the jungle man to go on alone.

"I'll go," Ki-Gor said suddenly, and he no longer tried to pretend before Tal. "I die a thousand times over with every inch the sun creeps through the sky. I can wait no longer"

HE EXPLAINED in great detail what Tal was to do for N'Geeso, and how he was not to stir from the platform until the pygmy awakened. Once N'Geeso regained his senses, he would be able to advise Tal as to food and necessary safety precautions.

"Look out for the Small One at first," Ki-Gor said affectionately. "He will probably want to kill you for letting me go, but if you stay out of his way for awhile he will be all right. And to keep him busy, have him tell what materials he needs to make a blow-gun and the poison for the darts, and then get them for him. That will keep him occupied for several days, and will mean plenty of game for you when he can get around."

The White Lord stood up, directed a last searching gaze at his two friends, and without a further word, ran sure-footedly along one of the branches supporting the tree house. He caught a dangling vine thick as a man's wrist, sprang out into space, whirled to a limb twenty feet away. Then before the wide-eyed Tal could gasp, Ki-Gor was gone, twisting, leaping, swinging out of sight through the middle branches.

Like a white ghost, he sped through the trees, a flickering will-of-the-wisp safe in his noiseless passage from the gaze of any searching party. Straight across the jungle he traveled, guided by animal instinct toward the direction in which Tal had pointed Tor-Ahdi. And added to the surging strength which rode his cabled muscles was a driving will which kept him traveling forward at a grueling, mile-devouring pace.

When dusk drove him from the tree paths, he searched out a trail on the ground. He rested briefly and then started on again on foot. The jungle roused with the coming of night, and the great killer-cats stalked abroad. Ki-Gor trotted along the dim, winding path, sword in hand, knowing full well the dangers he dared, but willing to face them because he could never rest until he reached Helene.

A hand of times death stalked him along that moonless way. A boa constrictor ranged on a limb overhanging the path dropped its choking coils in a sudden move to trap him, and he clashed out with his blade and fought free. A leopard rose from a stand of reeds in a soundless, flaring charge and he swung into the protection of the trees in barely the nick of time.

Again, a serval spun from the carcass of a dik-dik deer on which it fed, made a lightning slash at the man-thing that frightened it. The small fierce cat discovered its mistake too late, died with its head half cut away.

And a wounded roebuck, standing head down in the protection of a thorn bush, while the hot blood poured from hind quarters raked to the bone a half-hour before by a cheetah, made a rush at Ki-Gor. The always dangerous animal would have bowled him over had its own weakness not betrayed it, made it a fraction too slow to match the White Lord's reactions. It blundered away through the brush.

But in his final encounter that night with a jungle killer, Ki-Gor was the aggressor. A tree had fallen by a small, muddy water hole leaving a gash in the jungle roofing through which the moonlight flooded. As Ki-Gor started to move out of the darkness into this silver-splashed glade, a bush buck gave a scream of terror and broke into view.

Before the buck completed its first bound, a great liquid shape seemed to erupt from the earth. The antelope died in mid-stride, its back broken by the terrible stroke of the lion which had crept upwind and surprised it. The cat's white-gleaming fangs ripped through the soft neck, tore away quivering ribbons of flesh to make sure its prey was slain. Then the lion stood over its buck, thundered its kill to the jungle.

At his first warning of the bloody drama being played at the water hole, Ki-Gor froze where he stood. Then when he realized the cat wasn't conscious of his presence, he started to draw back a safe distance and circle the glade.

But the warm scent of the bush buck reminded him of his hunger. While this arrogant lion ate his fill of tender meat, Ki-Gor's only prospect was another meal of fruit and nuts. Without either spear or bow and lacking the time to stalk game, he had little chance of making a kill of his own. Goaded by his empty belly, Ki-Gor gripped his sword tighter, balanced for a single indecisive moment on the balls of his feet. Then when the lion again roared his challenge to the jungle, Ki-Gor flashed out of the darkness. He sprinted at the beast from behind, gambling that the freshly-spilled blood would cover his scent and that the lion's reverberating challenge would conceal the sound of his footsteps.

Two more steps and Ki-Gor would have won, but the great cat was not to be taken unawares. The cat sensed his presence, and whirled, rearing to crush this puny white creature which dared contest its meal. Ki-Gor threw himself to the side and slashed with a prodigous speed which outdid the death-dealing paws which ripped for him.

Through bone and flesh smashed the razorsharp blade, severing the beast's leg at the joint. The cat mouthed its pain, still whirling to catch the man-thing that slipped past its fangs by the merest margin. Knowing his life hung in balance, Ki-Gor bore straight in against the lion's shoulder.

Ki-Gor was against the creature then, his left arm locked about the savage neck, his vaulting legs scissoring about the lean, iron-hard belly. His right arm churned the sword into the beast's chest. The cat reared and fought, trying vainly to reach or dislodge the man on its back.

Ki-Gor's swiftly improvised maneuver was the only possible one which gave him a chance to live. The single place where the lion could not harm him was on its own back, and he rode it now like a leech, straining with every ounce of his magnificent strength to kill before the raging, beserk giant could tear him loose.

And the echoing fury of that epic battle rode out through the night, and the lesser creatures fell silent, knowing that two deadly jungle monarchs were pitted in a struggle to the death. They stood with quivering muscles along the shaded trails, cowered lower in dark, hidden trails. They heard the note of pain come into the lion's murderous snarls and roars, read in the sudden faltering of its thunderous voice the approach of death.

THEN there was sudden, ringing silence. For seconds longer, the jungle listened, waiting for the victor to cry out his paean of triumph, of power, of warning. But the huge-shouldered white man who stood panting over the stiffening body of his dead foe in the moonlit glade, turned silently to carve meat from the bush buck's carcass.

Ki-Gor took the meat and climbed into a tree, snuggling down in a fork to sleep until dawn. The grey light striking in his eyes from the east awakened him. He descended to the ground, soon had a small, almost smokeless fire going. He ate ravenously, hardly able to wait for the slices of meat spitted over the flames to cook. The rest and the food restored his strength, and he set out through the tree paths once more for Tor-Ahdi.

He reached the foothills that night, but in the darkness was unable to find the way to Tykar's stronghold. In the morning, however, he picked up a patrol of warriors returning to the village and stealthily tracked them. He made no effort to follow them into the narrow defile past the first two guards, but instead veered off to scout the area and learn whether there were other entrances.

Tal had been unable to enlighten him much about Tor-Ahdi, because the treaty forbids subjects of the two cities from passing certain boundaries. The people of Saadi-Sur had kept the treaty, and only vague, word-of-mouth accounts had come down from the old days when the women warriors tried repeatedly to storm Tor Ahdi.

It was hard going up the steep, brush-choked slopes. Barriers of thorn, deep ravines, jagged outcroppings of rock were but a few of the artful devices nature had used to make the area impassable. As Ki-Gor crawled and sweated his way upward, he better understood why the women warriors had failed to subdue the rebel males.

When he finally reached the lip of the valley, his heart fell at the task before him. He lay on his stomach behind a clump of weeds for an hour studying the movements of the black men in the village below, inspecting the precipitous cliffs, searching without success for a way other than the narrow defile to get into Tor-Ahdi.

He made a complete circuit of the valley, thinking that a yard by yard inspection might disclose some point where he could find sufficient handholds to climb down the cliff. But the sheer granite walls offered no single breech through which he could slip into Tor-Ahdi. He would have to enter through the canyon.

Grimfaced, Ki-Gor set out to scout the defile from its upper rim. He moved furtively along the edge, memorizing the position of the guards and the various turnings of the canyon, slowly working outward from the valley.

He had spotted the first two pairs of

guards and was trying to locate the positions of the third when a tangle of thorn barred his way. Since the thicket was impenetrable, he had to circle around it, going about a hundred yards away from the canyon. An odd, deep, thrumming noise brought him to a stop. He crouched down, wondering if the queer sound could be an alarm given by a warrior who had seen him. But after the noise died away and returned several times, Ki-Gor noted that it started up when the breeze stiffened and dwindled away when the wind faltered. He investigated, tracking the noise to a round hole in the earth no wider than his outstretched arms.

It was a deep pot-hole where a soft strata of limestone had been eroded through countless years of water seepage. Ki-Gor saw that the hole slanted away in the direction of the canyon, and since the thrumming noise came from deep within the earth, his interest quickened. It sounded to him as if the air was circulating completely through the hole, which might mean that it opened somewhere down on the canyon wall.

VIII

HE gathered a quantity of vines, knotted them into a long rope, and secured one end about a tree. Then he dropped the rope into the pot hole and slid down until his feet touched the slanting floor. He paid the vine out slowly, using it to maintain his balance as he walked down the steep incline. A small dot of light loomed ahead, and within a few minutes, Ki-Gor reached the end of the tunnel.

He excitedly found he was no more than sixty feet above the canyon floor. Only two pairs of guards stood between him and Tor-Ahdi. When darkness came, he could swing down the rope unobserved. These guards would be much less vigilant than those further out along the canyon, because no one had ever pierced this far into the stronghold.

Ki-Gor's fingers caressed his sword hilt, and as he settled down to wait for sunset, his eyes held an icy promise of death for any whose path should cross his in the dark hours.

Helene lay dazed and sick amid the debris of the hut. The fall from the elephant left her momentarily too shaken to stand. But with sound of the mob in her ears, she knew she must hide or be killed. Moaning with effort, she did manage to crawl a few yards before collapsing against a swaying fragment of wall left standing when the elephant ripped through the hut.

When she fell against the torn section of thatch, it gave way and crumpled over her. Barely conscious, she lay still. The angry blacks hadn't seen her knocked from the elephant. Now as they came pouring along the path of destruction left by the great beast, in their excitement they assumed she was still on its back. The mob raced past the crumpled heap of thatch covering her without a single warrior dreaming she would be hidden in so open a place.

Helene got her breath and her senses back after a time, but the shock had made her so weak, she could only lie still and listen to the sound of the hunt. She was certain at first that they would soon find her for repeatedly warriors passed within a few feet of her. But as time dragged by, the hunt moved away from the village and out onto the grassy floor of the wide valley of L'Gonda.

Helene's hopes rose. If she could escape discovery until nightfall she might yet get away. She cautiously poked a slit in the thatch, widened it until she had a partial view of the path leading between the huts to Tykar's residence. She watched warriors come and go with reports to Tykar, and at last in late afternoon, she saw him angrily leave to take command of the hunt himself. He was furious that Helene hadn't been found.

It was just at dusk that Helene had a shock. She heard the sandaled feet of several warriors pass her hiding place at a trot. Glancing through the peephole, she was startled to see one of the women of Saadi-Sur being taken up the path to Tykar's palace. Despite the dim light and the fleeting moment she had to observe the woman, she recognized her to be Taanee.

Tykar had managed to capture Suba's most trusted lieutenant! Helene caught her breath, thinking of the treatment in store for Taanee. The rage which Helene had aroused in the barbaric king would be vented on this new prisoner. When he re-

turned empty handed from his search, he would be utterly merciless.

Helene's heart went out to Taanee, and she knew she couldn't callously turn away without making some effort to help the woman. It wasn't in Helene's nature to think only of her own skin while a fellow-human suffered untold agonies only a few steps away. This new resolve took her mind from her own miseries, gave her an immediate objective to work toward. It was wholly dark now.

Helene crept from her hiding place, hardly knowing what she intended to do. She worked her way past deserted huts, circled the clearing so that she could approach from the rear the rabbit-warren which was Tykar's dwelling. Far out in the valley, she could see moving dots of light where torchbearing warriors searched the long grass.

She found a door and entered a dim, deserted room. She moved from room to room, taking courage as she found everyone had left to take part in the hunt. As she wandered further and further into the tangle of halls and disorganized cubicles, her tension mounted. If Tykar and his followers were to return, she couldn't hope to find her way out of the maze of rooms before being discovered. With this thought, she picked up a sword hanging on one of the walls.

Then more by chance than intent, she turned down a long, dirt-floored hall. Yellow torchlight gleamed in the room at the far end. She approached the light with the soft tread which Ki-Gor had taught her, but she felt the wild beating of her heart alone would make enough noise to betray her.

Two warriors lounged just within the door, discussing Helene's break for freedom and the fate in store for her when she was found. Helene moved a step closer so she could see past the two men. In the corner, half in shadow, sat Taanee.

The red-haired girl swiftly drew back into the darkness of the hall. Now that she had found Taanee, she didn't know what to do. She might be able to strike one of the warriors down with her sword, but she would be no match for the two of them.

But this quandary was solved by the warriors. One of them decided to step outside and see how their fellows were progressing in the night search. He went across the room and out a far door. The other warrior moved restlessly to the exit to stare after him.

Helene gripped the sword, her muscles tensing as she knew she had to act now or never. But still she hesitated, held by the thought that she must kill a man in cold blood. The sword felt heavy and awkward in her hand. She remembered then how Ki-Gor had knocked Tykar senseless with the flat of his blade, and she balanced her weapon, wondering if she couldn't do the same with the guard.

She moved soundlessly to the door, still debating what to do. Her foot touched an object, and looking down she saw a small stack of pitch-soaked pieces of wood, placed there ready for use as torches. Immediately, she shifted the sword to her left hand and picked up one of the torches with her right.

She raised the club, took three long reaching steps across the room and hit the guard with all her strength at the back of the neck. He gave a single brief, shallow grunt. His legs gave way as though the bones had suddenly dissolved and he sagged against the wall, dropped limply to the floor.

"What . . .?" exclaimed Taanee as Helene spun away from the senseless black. The woman warrior was so befuddled, she could only blink dumbly, her mouth working without forming a sound.

"Don't talk," hissed Helene. "We've barely time to get away before that other guard comes back." Then when the woman didn't move, she added: "Don't you understand? You've got a chance to get away. Come on and let's get out of here!"

"You mean," Taanee stuttered unbelievingly, "you came to save me?"

"Of course," Helene exclaimed in growing exasperation. "What's wrong with you? Are you hurt?"

5

HELENE hurried to the door through which she had entered the room. She could hear a growing hubbub in the village. The natives were returning from their search of the valley. Abruptly, Taanee seemed to come to herself.

"I'm all right," she said. She pointed to the door by which the guard had left.

"We can get out quicker this way," she urged. "It's just a few steps. I noticed the way when they brought me in."

"But the guard will see us," pointed out Helene.

"No," said the woman warrior. "This is a side door at the end of the hall. Hurry! I'll be right behind you."

As Taanee started up, Helene waited no longer. She darted in the direction the woman advised, heard Taanee close behind her. When she reached the end of the hall, she slowed, meaning to investigate before stepping out into the night. But Taanee pressed her impatiently, urging her forward with an arm about her shoulder.

"Keep going," the woman advised. "That guard did go this way!" And by both words and physical pressure, she carried Helene ahead of her through the door.

To her surprise, Helene found that instead of stepping out of a side entrance, she had come out of the front of the house onto the clearing where Tykar held court. And not ten yards away loomed the back of the guard who had been in the room with Taanee. He hadn't seen or heard them yet for his attention was focused on the groups of torchbearing warriors milling through the village. The men were returning to their huts to eat and rest, secure in the knowledge that the escaped prisoner couldn't get out of the valley.

Helene froze, bracing her legs so suddenly that she also brought Taanee to a halt. "Back in the house," she whispered, turning around. "Quickly, you fool," she said pushing against the woman warrior, "Can't you see that man?"

Then to Helene's shock, Taanee caught her in a choking bear hug. "Guard! Guard!" the woman warrior cried.

Helene fought madly, but the powerful Taanee had locked her arms at her side so she couldn't bring the sword into play. The red-haired girl was like a crazed thing, realizing that the woman she risked her life to save had betrayed her. With a surprised cry, the guard leaped in to help Taanee, and the two of them pinned Ki-Gor's mate to the ground.

They were still struggling with her when Tykar arrived. Taanee surrendered her place to one of his warriors. Smiling, she stood up and brushed the dirt from her arms and legs.

"You caught the she-devil!" exulted Tykar. "By the gods, she'll pay for making me tramp over this valley while she skulked in hiding. Where was she?"

"She came straight to me," chuckled Taanee. "She wanted to save me. She thought I was a prisoner."

TYKAR'S loose, fat lips twisted gloatingly as he stared down at the helpless girl. He kicked her viciously.

"So you wanted to save Taanee, uh?" he said. "Why you stupid fool, don't you know that she's the one who kidnapped you for me."

Helene ceased her struggles. Tykar's words suddenly made everything clear to her. She looked at Taanee with hate.

"Of all filthy things a traitor is the worst," she said. "You're lower than Tykar, betraying your own people to these killers. What do you hope to gain?"

Taanee bent quickly and slapped Helene across the mouth.

"Hold your tongue, slave," she snarled. "Once Suba is conquered, I'll rule beside Tykar over the combined lands of Tor-Ahdi and Saadi-Sur. Do you think I've borne Suba's arrogance, had her wipe her feet on me since childhood, because I liked it? My right to the throne is as strong as hers, but the council picked her over me when the old queen died. Yes, I'm her cousin and older than she, but they said I was too headstrong to rule wisely, so they passed me by. Well, soon now they shall learn their mistake! You and Suba both will learn what it is to crawl."

Taanee's angry rush of words betrayed how great was her stored-up hate of Suba, a hate more violent because she was forced to keep it bottled up within her day after day while she smiled and bowed to the queen. Helene's lips curled with scorn. "You will make a worthy addition to Tykar's black wives," she taunted. "What will you be, queen number twelve or fifteen?"

"I'll kill you for that," screamed Taanee reaching for the sword which had been taken from Helene.

"Wait," restrained Tykar, putting a hand on her arm.

"But you heard that insult," declared Taanee. "That's too much!"

Tykar smiled unctiously. "She will be punished, my Taanee," he purred,

"for that insult and for the trouble she's caused me. I meant only that you mustn't make it too easy for her. The way to begin is with a flogging. After all, why kill her until we capture her husband. I've given a lot of thought to what I want to do to him, and she'll be very useful for what I have in mind. He'll suffer the torments of damned Ipii devils before I'm through with him."

He gave a curt order to the blacks holding Helene, and as they started to lift her, he caught hold of her long hair and savagely jerked her erect.

"When they told me you were waiting," Tykar said to Taanee, "I thought perhaps you wanted to tell me that you had captured Ki-Gor."

Taanee looked uneasily at the king. "I couldn't manage it," she confessed, explaining how Suba had imprisoned Ki-Gor. "The prison guards are loyal to Suba and there wasn't any way I could get him out without arousing suspicion. I was waiting until she released him—but he escaped."

"What?" roared Tykar. His face was abruptly terrible with rage at the thought of Ki-Gor escaping.

"But listen to me," pleaded Taanee. "This is our chance to smash Saadi-Sur. That's why I came here myself."

She explained that Suba had been angered by Helene's mysterious disappearance and had had search parties combing both the city and the surrounding jungle.

"Now that Ki-Gor has escaped, she's like a mad woman," cried Taanee. "She's put me in charge of the search and thinks I'm scouring the jungle for him now. That's how I got the chance to come here. She told me to use every warrior in Saadi-Sur if necessary to find him."

Tykar's scowl deepened. "Why tell me all that," he growled. "Instead of coming here, why aren't you hunting him. He mustn't get away! I'll turn my own men out after him."

"No, no, don't you see?" said Taanee. "This is our chance. When she gave me complete control of the guards, I sent more than two-thirds of the women out of Saadi-Sur, spread them in small groups over both the upper and lower hunting grounds. You have only to take your men straight in and attack the weak garrison. After Sur falls, it will be child's play to destroy or capture the small cringing bands of women in the field."

Tykar stared spellbound at the woman for a full half-minute, his fleshy face slowly altering as the anger drained out of it.

"Like crushing an egg," he said as if to himself. "The chance I've dreamed of." Then the excitement flared into his voice. "I'm ready to march at dawn," he told Taanee. "Your plan is perfect. At last we've caught Suba offguard."

Taanee moved closer to him. "And now do we teach this wench a lesson, soon-to-be husband?" she said.

"Hai!" cried Tykar. "I'll carry out your wish myself. I'll flog every inch of hide from her!"

He turned and walked swiftly into the house. He was back right away, carrying a short, heavy whip made of rhino hide. He caressed the metal-studded thongs which sprayed out from the end of the lash. Besides the two blacks who held Helene's arms, three more of Tykar's minions waited close by.

"Bring torches to light the she-devil," he commanded, slapping the whip lightly across his palm.

The men swiftly obeyed, circling Helene at a few yards distance so that the flickering light fell over her white body, struck fire from her hair. Tykar maneuvered behind the helpless girl.

Instead of tying her to a post, Tykar had a warrior get on either side of Helene and pull outward on her arms. Thus she was held painfully erect, virtually spread-eagled in thin air, for it was necessary for her also to brace her legs wide to resist the brutal tug of the blacks.

"Strip her!" commanded Tykar, his narrowed eyes running over her slim figure.

One of the burly torchbearers leaped eagerly forward, a dagger raised, and cut off the leopard skin halter which covered Helene's swelling bosom. Helene tried to fight, but there was no way she could ward off that gleaming knife-attack. With a single swipe the halter fell away.

Then he reached for the waist of her shorts, and Tykar swung his whip up for the first blow. Taanee wet her lips with her tongue, her breath coming in hard, quick gusts as she waited for the lash to fall.

IX

THE African night gathered purple and deep in the canyon, when at last Ki-Gor crawled to the edge of the cave mouth. He lay quiet a long while, listening. From somewhere on the slopes above him sounded the thin far-away cry of a hunting leopard, but in the defile below, all was quiet.

He dropped the end of the vine rope into the darkness. After securing his sword in a leather thong at his waist, he gripped the vine, climbed over the side. He braced his feet against the rock face, cautiously let himself down.

The White Lord moved softly along the canyon floor until he reached the first pair of guards. They lounged beside a small fire, and because of the narrowness of the way, there was no chance for Ki-Gor to pass them. The fire lighted enough area for the warriors to identify anyone who approached before they got within striking distance.

Ki-Gor crept as close as he dared, stretching flat on the ground up against the cliff. He gripped his sword, trying to decide how he could dispatch the warriors without raising an alarm. While he lay there, a man approached from the valley. The guards heard footsteps and were ready and waiting before he even reached the firelight, but he swiftly identified himself at their hail.

The White Lord guessed him to be one of Tykar's officials. The newcomer told the men the prisoner hadn't yet been captured and warned them to be doubly watchful.

"Tykar is in a rage," Ki-Gor heard the man say. "He narrowly escaped injury himself when the red-haired wench knocked over the platform. It'll mean your lives if she gets past you."

Helene was alive! That knowledge alone was enough to make Ki-Gor's blood course faster. He had feared he would find that the cruel Tykar had already tortured and slain her. He thought of her frightened and alone, hiding somewhere in the valley. He gritted his teeth, and only by the greatest exertion of will, kept from leaping out to cut these warriors down as he would jackals.

But it was wise he held himself back. The warriors continued to discuss the progress of the hunt, for being unable to participate, the two guards were consumed with curiosity. They followed the third man down the canyon towards Ki-Gor, still asking him questions when he started toward the next pair of guards.

The three came toward Ki-Gor, excitedly talking. The White Lord made himself as small as possible, his muscles tensed for battle. But coming away from the fire, the eyes of the three didn't have time to adjust to the darkness before they passed the jungle man. He lay only a few yards outside the circle of light, and they had no cause to fear anyone coming from that direction. Five pairs of warriors were posted between them and the outside entrance to the canyon.

When they went by him, the two guards already were slowing their steps preparatory to turning back. In that moment, Ki-Gor saw his chance. Like a great cat, he silently came to his feet and ran toward the fire. He relied on his animal stealth to get him past the lighted place in the brief interval while the three men had their backs toward him.

And his incredible boldness paid off. He darted past the fire and into the darkness a fraction before the guards turned around. Ironically enough, he heard them discussing as he moved out of earshot the impossibility of anyone getting past their post. They were laughing about Tykar thinking it necessary to send them a warning to be alert.

When Ki-Gor approached the next guardpost, the only other one lying between him and the valley, he could see the search in progress. A long line of blacks was methodically beating through the deep grass. As they moved toward the canyon, the warriors used spears to prod every suspicious hummock disclosed by their torches. The two guards stood at the mouth of the canyon, watching their fellows draw closer.

Ki-Gor repeated his maneuver of inching up close to the fire. When the searchers got near the end of the valley, the whole line swung to the left so as to sweep a new area of grass without breaking formation. The guards, shouting to the nearest men as the line worked past them, stepped a few yards out into the valley so they

could still see the excitement. The guards now had their backs to Ki-Gor, and outside the entrance, the searchers moved away so that they also faced away from him.

On hands and knees he crawled past the fire, hardly daring to breathe at the thought of what would happen if one of the warriors should turn. He reached the end of the canyon and turned to the right, away from the guards, hugging the cliff until the darkness safely cloaked him. He looked back in time to see the two warriors move back to their fire.

With a deep sigh, he realized he was past the first hurdle. A glance told him that most of the villagers were searching through the deep grass. While they were occupied in the valley, his wisest course would be to familiarize himself with the village. He felt it was quite probable that they would recapture Helene, and in such case, he would need to know how to get around in the sizeable cluster of huts. He could locate a hiding place in a deserted hut for use if he had to get under cover.

HE snaked into the area through which the blacks had just come. He thought he would be safe enough, but before he had gone any distance, he found that the wily Tykar had dropped men all along behind his beaters to guard against Helene doubling back on him. The blacks squatted quietly out of sight, listening for the rustle of dry grass which would betray anyone trying to move past them. It was a simple, but cunning move, for it was natural that if Helene managed to evade the torchbearers, she would feel the ideal place to hide was the section already covered by Tykar.

Ki-Gor first learned of this trick when one of the blacks suddenly sprang up and reached for him. The native acted in silence, because he thought the person he heard was Helene, and he wanted to grab her before she became alarmed.

Ki-Gor saw the dark form dive at him, and though startled instead of trying to avoid the man, he swayed forward himself, jabbing his sword straight out. The native impaled himself, driving the blade through his chest with his own momentum. His hands, which had caught at Ki-Gor's throat, slid limply away.

The White Lord stepped over the man and moved on with redoubled caution. Twice he discovered crouching blacks, but now that he knew Tykar's game, he played it with such skill that the natives never suspected his presence.

When he reached the village, he kept to the shadow of the huts, artfully taking advantage of every bit of cover. Ki-Gor searched through several houses until he found a heavy war bow and a quiver of arrows. Then, feeling better armed, he grew bolder. He had made a complete circuit of the village when he saw that the torchbearers were returning. He cut in toward the center of the village, skirted along the clearing until he reached Tykar's house.

He was debating whether to risk entering the house when he saw a warrior step out of a door not twenty yards from him. Ki-Gor dropped down, looking around for a place to hide. He spotted the crumpled remains of the platform which the elephant had upended and crawled over to it.

Then keeping the platform between him and the warrior, Ki-Gor crawled toward one of the trees which had been left around the edge of the clearing to furnish shade. He watched his chance, and when the black turned away for a moment, Ki-Gor swung into the tree, noiselessly climbed into the upper branches. He decided his perch would make an excellent observation point. He could see without being seen, and if the return of the blacks meant that Helene had been caught, they were certain to bring her to the clearing.

Most of the warriors were going to their huts, but he watched a small clot of men enter the clearing. When he recognized Tykar, he saw with relief that Helene wasn't with him. Then a woman's smothered, angry cry jerked his attention back to the warrior by the house.

He saw two women struggling, heard one of them cry, "Guard! Guard!" Despite the darkness, he recognized one of the slim figures as Helene. When the black leaped in to help throw Helene to the ground, Tykar and his men already were running across the clearing.

Despite the torture of seeing his mate roughly handled, Ki-Gor couldn't afford to interfere. He would throw away any chance of saving her if he showed him-

self. Tykar and his guards would easily overpower Ki-Gor unless he could take them unawares.

Through slitted, burning eyes he watched them crow over Helene. With a shock, he realized the other woman was Taanee. He was filled with contempt for her when he learned her treacherous plan to crush *Sur*. But when he saw them prepare to whip Helene, brute, primitive rage beat up in the White Lord.

When they brought torches and he could clearly see his beloved mate held brutally upright by two blacks, a low snarl broke from his lips. Then when Tykar ordered Helene to be stripped and a leering native leaped forward and ripped away her halter, Ki-Gor's control exploded.

He no longer counted chances or weighed the consequences. Blotted by red fury from his mind was everything in the world except the small group torturing his wife. Like a berserk animal, he knew only the desire to kill.

Ki-Gor's great war bow bent under the sudden wrench of his powerful arms. The bowstring sang the swift violence of his shot. And streaking across the clearing, the arrow tore its full length through the native as his knife touched Helene's leopard skin shorts.

The black screamed, twirled twice around and fell kicking. Before he struck the ground one of the warriors holding Helene staggered back with a black shaft through his throat. His companion give a screech of terror, ran a few queer, bucking steps and collapsed, his belly ripped open by an arrow.

Tykar stood frozen for a second, paralyzed by the sudden, deadly rain of arrows. Though he didn't know it, Helene herself was the one who saved his own miserable life. Because he stood directly behind her, Ki-Gor couldn't risk shooting at him. Fear blasted over Tykar and like a frightened rabbit he sped for the door of his house.

As though panic had struck the whole group at once with the same idea, Taanee and the two torchbearers who still lived fled with him. The two blacks were unfortunate enough to let Taanee and Tykar get a step ahead of them. Their bodies took the arrows meant for the traitorous woman and the king.

ONE of them pitched on his face before he had gone three steps. The other died within a foot of safety, an arrow catching him between the shoulders as he darted in the door. But the two Ki-Gor wanted most to kill ducked into the house unscathed, plunging on through room after room in their breathless terror.

The screams of the man with his stomach torn open sounded through the village. Already warriors were running from their huts to investigate. Ki-Gor dropped through the branches, calling to Helene.

But not until he reached the ground and she could actually see him, did the bewildered girl realize that the White Lord had indeed come to save her. With a sobbing cry of relief, she sprinted to him. He caught her hand, led her at a run into the shadow of the huts. They twisted and turned, following the route which Ki-Gor had charted for an escape when he first investigated the village. They kept to darkness as much as possible, trying to keep away from the main ways and travel behind the huts.

Several times the huge-shouldered White Lord bowled over surprised blacks, knocking them kicking. The jungle couple appeared so swiftly, so unexpectedly that they had swept past before the blacks could move. Then by the time the villagers started after them, Ki-Gor and Helene had twisted away out of sight.

Thus, though they escaped capture, every passing second added more warriors to the growing mob racing behind them. At the very edge of the village a warrior tried to block their way, but Ki-Gor beat him down with the bow. Then they were running through the high grass, driving for the point of light at the mouth of the canyon.

Ki-Gor sprinted in the lead, breasting a path through the grass for Helene. An occasional threshing told them of hidden watchers attempting to stop them, but except once when they ran straight into a man and Ki-Gor paused long enough to shatter his skull, they succeeded by their very speed in getting past the scattered natives.

But in back of them the aroused villagers turned night into day with their torches as they came flooding over the valley. Helene knew nothing of the plan

Ki-Gor had in mind, but she wasted no time trying to question him. She was glad to place herself in his hands, knowing if there was a single chance to escape, he would utilize it.

The two guards at the entrance of the canyon saw and heard the pursuit. They thought Helene had at last been discovered, and fearing nothing from a girl, they stood in plain view, ready to bar her way if she try to head into the defile. In the darkness, they couldn't see that two figures came toward them.

"Keep going!" panted Ki-Gor to Helene as he stopped, steadied the bow. The men saw Helene's white body as she reached the light from their fire and they started forward eagerly. Ki-Gor's arrows ripped their life away, tumbled them grotesquely on the ground.

He caught up with Helene as she entered the canyon, and fitting another arrow to his bow as he ran, he passed her. The second pair of guards heard their approach and leaped back beyond their fire, crying out. When they got no answer they raised their spears, ready to cast the moment the runners entered the light.

Ki-Gor, now well ahead of Helene, rocketed out of the darkness. He shot an arrow as he ran, staggering one of the guards. But the other black lashed his spear at the White Lord and ran forward, drawing his sword. Instead of trying to dodge, Ki-Gor swung the bow with lightning swiftness at the flying spear and deflected it. Then he swung and hit the black's sword a ringing blow.

He was against the native then, and dropping the bow, he caught the man by the throat. His steel fingers bit with such terrible violence, that he twisted the black to his knees and with a savage wrench, snapped his neck. He flung the man away like a rag-doll.

Helene caught up with him as he bent to the fire, snatched up a burning faggot. He sped close to the cliff wall, holding the faggot so that he could locate where he had left the vine rope. A roar of sound suddenly echoed down the canyon. The mob had found the bodies of the first pair of guards and now they swept down the defile with wild, murderous shouts.

Ki-Gor saw the vine and stopping Helene, he gasped, "Climb up! There's a small cave above that leads to safety."

He dropped the faggot, and catching Helene about the hips, lifted her as high as he could. She grasped the rope and shinnied upwards. Holding the vine to steady it, Ki-Gor reached down and put out the make-shift torch.

The warriors of Tor-Ahdi were so close that the thunder of their voices rolled fearsomely in the narrow defile. Ki-Gor looked down the canyon with growing apprehension, saw a wave of light sweep into view. Then the vine no longer trembled in his grasp and he knew Helene had reached the cave.

X

HAND over hand he went up the rope, climbing with an ape-like agility. But he wasn't quick enough to escape the eyes of the warriors. They were so near that the glare of their torches lighted his straining figure.

A spear crashed against the cliff below him. An arrow broke on the rock not a yard from his head. Then he caught hold of the ledge and swung up beside Helene. A hail of spears and arrows hammered around them. But the mob was a fraction too late.

Ki-Gor pushed Helene into the cave, told her to hold onto the vine and keep climbing. He saw the rope tighten where it dropped over the ledge, and from the burst of noise from the crowd, knew that some foolhardy warrior was trying to climb up to the ledge. Ki-Gor drew his sword and chopped the vine in half, plunging the black down on his fellows. They were safe from pursuit. There was no way for the warriors to reach the cave from the canyon floor. Ki-Gor turned and followed Helene through the darkness.

Tykar, Taanee and their bloodthirsty followers raged because they thought they had lost two prisoners. What they did not realize was that they had gained the most dangerous foe in the whole of the Congo when Ki-Gor got away. For even as Ki-Gor climbed up the tunnel, a grim plan took shape in his mind to smash the cruel legions of Tor-Ahdi.

N'Gesso and Tal were overjoyed when the jungle couple suddenly appeared through the tree lanes. The pygmy's

leg was sufficiently healed for him to travel, but the jungle had been swarming with so many warriors searching for Ki-Gor that the two couldn't stir from the tree house.

For the past two days, N'Geeso had kept constant vigil with his newly-finished blow gun and an ample supply of poisoned *kalchi* thorns. More than a hand of women warriors never knew how close they had been to death as they passed beneath the tree house.

"The women will move on to another area by tomorrow," declared N'Geeso. "Then we can get out of this accursed land."

"Not yet," said Ki-Gor. "I have a personal matter to settle with him."

N'Geeso glanced questioningly at the White Lord. "Isn't it enough to have all the women of *Sur* against you without taking on Tykar's warriors?"

Ki-Gor grinned. "I hope to get the women warriors to help us." He stood up and walked out on a limb. "Stay here until I return. I go to talk with Suba." Then before they could protest the danger into which he went, he disappeared through the trees.

Several hours later, Ki-Gor dropped to the ground before the walls of Sur and boldly strode up to the huge gate. Before he reached it, an alarm sounded from a watcher on the walls and the gate swung wide. Armed women ran out to surround the White Lord.

He smiled at them and demanded to see Suba. They disarmed him and led him to the palace. He didn't resist when they shackled his arms and legs. He was certain Suba would see him, not because he demanded it, but because she would wish to vent her fury on the man who had caused her so much trouble.

When they brought him before the queen, she eyed him with grim satisfaction and then burst out in a violent tongue-lashing. "The council wanted to kill you before, and I protected you," she declared. "I was wrong. You killed Vion and your antics have caused unrest among the men. I mean to make an example of you. You will be beheaded in five days!"

When she paused for breath, Ki-Gor looked at her without resentment. "If you wait five days," he said mildly, "I'm afraid the execution will have to be carried out by Tykar. You see, unless you quit shouting and begin to listen to me, he'll be ruling what's left of *Sur* by then."

She glared at Ki-Gor, "What's that?" she demanded.

Then quietly, while Suba listened incredulously, he told how he had rescued Helene, and how in the process he had learned of the plot to attack Saadi-*Sur*.

"Impossible!" she scoffed but there was a strange uneasy look on her face. "Taanee would never betray me."

"Am I such a fool that I would give myself up to you, if it weren't the truth?" he asked. "Within two days you'll learn the truth, but unless you act now, *Sur* will be beyond saving."

By traveling through the trees, Ki-Gor and Helene had been able to make the return trip two days faster than could be done on foot. They had watched Tykar's legions march out of the canyon at dawn, headed for Saadi-*Sur*. Despite his wish to recapture Helene and Ki-Gor, Tykar dared not miss the chance to crush the hated women, so couldn't press the search for the jungle couple.

His precise recital of Taanee's words, his description of the size of Tykar's force impressed Suba. He described the two elephants and how Tykar meant to use them to batter in the gates.

"It should be easy to prove Taanee's treachery," he pointed out. "Helene was lowered from the walls where the water outlet from the men's bathing pool leaves the city. Get the guards who were assigned to that section of the walls and make them talk. They are bound to be part of the small group working with Taanee."

AN hour later Suba had wrung a confession from the guards on duty the night Helene was kidnapped. Her methods weren't tempered with mercy, but they were effective. She learned the names of all the traitors and swiftly had them rounded up and imprisoned. Then she had Ki-Gor freed.

He apologized to her for thinking that she had been the one who kidnapped Helene, but she waved away his explanations. "I knew why you acted that way," she said. "That's why I wouldn't let the council kill you. I only envied the woman

who could inspire such love in you and I honestly tried to find her."

She had dismissed her women, and now she paced restlessly back and forth. She gave Ki-Gor a searching glance, and he wondered what was in her mind. Finally, she turned to a window and looked out over Sur.

"What shall I do, Ki-Gor?" she asked, and her arrogant mask was gone and she was a frightened woman asking for aid. "You've tried to save Saadi-*Sur* but the truth is that I can't defend it. Taanee has beaten me. I have only a small garrison of women. The others are too far away to get here in time."

Her shoulders slumped wearily, and she wouldn't look at him for no one had ever seen tears in her eyes.

"I can save the city," Ki-Gor said quietly, "If you promise to carry out the plans I make."

She turned then, no longer caring if he saw her tears. "I'll do anything to keep my people safe," she promised.

"Let me arm the men, then," he demanded."

She stiffened, anger coming into her face. Then slowly she relaxed and nodded her head in agreement.

"I'll keep my promise even on that," she said, "but what good will it do. You can't make warriors of them in two days. They've never handled weapons in their lives."

"Leave that to me," Ki-Gor said, and then he went on with his demand.

He had Suba send messengers to order the search parties to return immediately, but instead of having them come to the city, Ki1Gor specified that they gather at a certain clearing about a mile away. He had parties sent into the jungle to gather a list of herbs, roots and leaves, while other groups were set to work preparing an adequate supply of bows and arrows. Suba shook her head wonderingly at the request, but she complied without argument.

Then while the men were being fitted with armor and taught to shoot bows, Ki-Gor himself went to get Helene and his two friends. He told them his plans as they returned to the city. N'Geeso's part was especially important for Ki-Gor immediately put him to work brewing poison from the materials which he had had the women gather.

Ki-Gor drilled the men mercilessly, and to the surprise of the women, they worked hard and without complaining. The women did not hear the talks Ki-Gor gave the men about this being their chance not only to save their own lives, but also to prove for all time to the women that they weren't inferior. The marksmanship of the newly recruited warriors was awful, but with N'Geeso's poison tipping their arrows, all they had to do was scratch a foe to kill him. And it would be an entirely unexpected form of warfare to Tykar, who had never known of poisoned darts or arrows.

Two hours before sunset on the second day after Ki-Gor started his preparations, Tykar's army swarmed out of the jungle and formed solid ranks before the wall housing the gate into the city. They massed, yelling and prancing, beating their shields with spears. They left a lane for the elephants and the two great beasts were led forward side by side.

The blacks saw only three women on the walls when they first arrived, and even after these sounded a panicky alarm, not more than forty more appeared to reinforce them. Ki-Gor had carefully instructed these women, and they gave every appearance of being frightened and confused.

Tykar pranced jubilantly up and down before his warriors, wild with joy at the thought of the easy victory before him. Taanee stood in the lané left for the elephants, her face set and grim now that the fruits of her treachery were almost in reach.

The sight of the weak force on the walls was too much for the black warriors. Before the elephants' reached the gates, the men broke ranks and ran close enough to use their spears and bows. Tykar made no effort to hold them. He was infected even more than they with reckless confidence. The taunts they shouted were music to his ears.

This was the moment for which Ki-Gor waited. He signaled the double rank of men crouching out of sight on the walls, and they came to their feet with drawn bows. Like one many-armed machine, they lashed arrows into the thickly-packed mass crowded beneath them. With that huge milling

target to shoot at, blind men couldn't have missed. Accuracy and power were unimportant. A weakly fired arrow or one deflected by a shield or helmet remained deadly so long as it scraped a black arm or cheek.

Within the first minute, that rain of poisoned arrows took a dreadful toll. Men who never had been touched, or who shrugged away minor flesh wounds in their excitement, suddenly reeled and fell, their faces twisted and awful. The realization that they were being slaughtered didn't come immediately to the men of Tor-Ahdi. They were surprised at the sudden appearance of the bowmen, but they were so convinced they would win a quick victory that they stood their ground.

THEY heard no cries of wounded and dying men around them. The pygmy poison acted with such swiftness that men toppled over without uttering a sound. But as that chilling rain continued to fall, there were abruptly corpses crowded everywhere under the feet of the living. Bewildered, fearful cries rippled through the black army.

Yet they still held on, for now the huge elephants were within twenty yards of the gate. Tykar had promised them that the gate would immediately crumple before the beasts and then they could rush in and quickly end the battle with their superior numbers.

Ki-Gor and N'Geeso had stationed themselves above the gate and as the elephants moved near, they drove specially poisoned arrows deep into the giant bodies. The beasts trumpeted angrily as the arrows bit into their thick hides, but they kept moving until their great heads came against the gate.

This was the duty they had been trained for and they braced their feet, gave a tentative shove to test the barrier.

Then as they started to apply their ponderous power, one of them staggered and slipped to its knees. It gave a single convulsive jerk and lay still. The other elephant died on its feet and toppled so abruptly that it crushed its trainer.

A black clawed to get away from the walls. How could they fight against a mysterious death which struck down the giant animals with such ease? The whole group thrust back against their fellows, and the spark of panic leaped from man to man until the whole force was fleeing toward the forest in utter disorder.

A cheer went up from the defenders, and men and women joyfully clasped each other. The thickly-littered dead strewing the ground beneath them made them believe they had completely and finally defeated Tykar. Many of them clamored for the gates to be opened so that they might pursue their enemies.

But Ki-Gor knew his inexperienced warriors would be cut to pieces in the open. He realized that Tykar wasn't beaten. The black king would reorganize his troops, and now that he knew he had a real battle to fight, he would attack carefully.

And as the White Lord expected, Tykar drew a tight net about the city. He attacked no more that day or the next. Instead, from the wall the defenders could see the blacks busily at work along the edge of the jungle. Ki-Gor explained that the warriors were weaving thick mats which they would hold over them to ward off the poison arrows until they got close enough to scale the walls. The besiegers also cut many long slender trees, chopping the branches off about a foot from the trunk to form primitive, many-runged ladders.

Ki-Gor had great earthen pots of pitch-soaked wood placed atop the walls, with lighted torches kept burning close at hand. He called all the guard leaders together, explained the use of wood to fire Tykar's attack mats. Then he told the guard leaders that he and Suba went to bring up the women warriors who by now were gathered not far from the city.

"Tomorrow when Tykar attacks, we will crush him," he promised. "Stand firm and follow N'Geeso's orders. Tykar thinks he has the city sealed off so we can't get word to the women warriors. He doesn't know the women are near the city. Tomorrow we teach him a lesson."

Late that night Ki-Gor led Suba out of the city through the drainage outlet. They emerged beyond the enemy's lines and made their way to where the women were camped. At dawn they led the force back toward Saadi-*Sur*, remaining in hiding until the shouts of Tykar's warriors told them the attack had started.

When they reached the edge of the jungle, they saw the blacks swarming at the city from every side. Tykar was using his superior numbers to press the attack equally all around the walls and thus draw thin the smaller defending army. The warriors advanced in concentrated groups, each completely covered by a thick mat which they supported on their raised shields.

As they reached the walls, they maneuvered to bring their crude scaling ladders into play. They gained confidence as arrows and spears thudded harmelssly onto their protective matting. Then suddenly the great pots of burning woods were dumped on them by the defenders. The thick mats burst into flame.

When they threw aside the mats, the deadly arrows began to take their toll. But Tykar and his officers held the warriors firm, and they threw up their scaling ladders. Though many died, the outnumbered defenders were unable to be everywhere they were needed.

Ki-Gor seized this time to send the women warriors into the fray. At his command, they charged out of the forest, wild with eagerness to close with the foe. Suba and he raced before them, and like a long gleaming sword the armor-clad women swept over the clearing. They were born to battle, these fierce, tall women, and in them was that warrior's pride which comes with a lifetime of discipline.

CRIES of terror went up as the black force discovered the Amazons. Tykar's men were partly on the ladders, a few groups on the walls already, and the rest busily engaged with spears and bows trying to drive the defenders away from the scaling ladders. Their position was suddenly reversed for by concentrating their attack on only one side of the square city, the women managed to outnumber the enemy.

The women washed against the wall in a wave of steel. They were ruthless. The blacks melted away before them. The defenders on the walls pressed their own efforts with new heart and the ladders came tumbling down, spilling more men to their death.

Ki-Gor and Suba fought together, and the tide of battle swept them to where Taanee and Tykar were trapped against the wall. Taanee's face was like chalk as she saw ruin engulfing her. And Tykar screamed and beat at the men who had gathered to defend him. The chief was crazed by the sudden turn of fortune, his eyes bulging and a white froth on his fat lips.

When Ki-Gor spotted Tykar, all the rage he felt the night he saw Helene mistreated flared high again. He drove against the thin line of blacks, carrying the women warriors forward in his terrible charge. The warriors shattered apart and Ki-Gor leaped through to reach Tykar.

The king reeled back under Ki-Gor's lightning attack. He tried to disengage and flee, but Ki-Gor pressed him too hard. Back he was forced, step by step, until the wall came against his shoulders. Faster and ever faster came Ki-Gor's sword-strokes until at last the straining Tykar faltered in his defense the single time that Ki-Gor needed.

The White Lord's blade flashed through the opening, drove a scarlet streak across the king's throat.

Tykar dropped his sword, collapsed to his knees, his head rolling back as blood came in a scarlet fountain from the gaping wound in his neck.

Ki-Gor turned in time to see Suba and Taanee locked in furious combat. Taanee fought skillfully, but the queen's blade was like a leaping flame.

"Traitor!" snarled Suba and she laid open Taanee's cheek. A second time, the queen spat the word at her foe and her blade reached again as if for a cheek cut. Taanee threw up her sword to ward off the expected blow. But instead of the face, the queen plunged for Taanee's midriff, sank her sword to its hilt.

Taanee stumbled back, her hands pressed to her stomach. She gave a shudder and her legs gave way. Suba watched expressionlessly a moment, then spun on her heel and stalked away.

While Ki-Gor and Suba were engaged, the main body of women warriors had swept on around the city. Now as Ki-Gor followed them, he saw the gate swing open and N'Geeso led the garrison forth to complete the rout. Ki-Gor noted that Tal trotted beside the pygmy, and despite his inex-

perience, the man of Sur fought well and bravely.

Within an hour it was all over, and into the city which they had dreamed of capturing, filed the captured remnants of the dead king's army. Helene and Ki-Gor stood beside Suba to watch the dazed warriors file past. And marching the prisoners before the queen were not the women warriors of Saadi *Sur,* but the men who had so bravely defended the city.

Ki-Gor watched them proudly pass, and smiled inwardly, knowing that in allowing the men this honor that the women were recognizing their new place. Never again would the men return to their harem existence. Henceforth, they would hold their rightful position in the city.

As Tal marched stiffly by, the queen whispered to one of her attendants. The woman nodded and hurried to whisper in Tal's ear. The young warrior left the marchers and approached Suba.

"Ki-Gor tells me," the queen said, "this victory would never have been possible without you."

Tal flushed with pleasure. "Both you and Ki-Gor give me far too much honor," he declared.

"I think," said Suba smiling, "that from now on you'll not lack for honor in Saadi-*Sur,* for now our men will guard the seven silver skulls, which tell the world of our mastery over L'Gonda."

Ki-Gor and Helene exchanged an understanding glance, and strolled away to where N'Geeso sat with his eyes closed. Now that the battle was over, the little chieftain

had no further interest in the men of Tor-Ahdi. The White Lord nudged him with his toe.

"Tomorrow we go to Tor-Ahdi to escort the slaves back to their tribes," he told the pygmy.

"Good!" said N'Geeso. "Already it grows too quiet here for a fighting man."

Helene shook her head despairingly. She turned then and started back into the jungle. Ki-Gor and N'Geeso followed.

FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES A Fiction House Magazine FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES

EARLIEST EXPLORATION of AFRICA

THE NORTHWEST COAST OF AFRICA WAS FIRST EXPLORED BY THE CARTHAGINIANS, DARING MARINERS AND TRADERS OF ANCIENT TIMES.

SPAIN

CARTHAGE

RIO DE ORO

SAHARA DESERT

AFRICA

CAPE VERDE

GOLD COAST

LIBERIA

?

WALTER GALL!

...IN 520 B.C. --HANNO-- A BOLD SEA CAPTAIN, SAILED WITH A FLEET FROM CARTHAGE ON ONE OF THE MOST MEMORABLE VOYAGES IN HISTORY!

SAILING OUT THROUGH THE STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR INTO THE ATLANTIC, **HANNO** STEERED SOUTHWARD FOR WEEKS THROUGH UNKNOWN WATERS...TIME AND AGAIN THE EXPLORERS WERE FRIGHTENED AWAY FROM SHORE BY THE BOOMING WAR DRUMS OF HOSTILE NATIVES...ASTONISHED BY THE VAST SIZE OF THE CONTINENT WHOSE SHORE LINE SEEMED TO STRETCH ON WITHOUT END, **HANNO** AND HIS MEN, OVERCOMING THEIR DREAD OF UNKNOWN PERILS, PUSHED ON PAST CAPE VERDE. LANDING NEAR THE MOUTH OF THE GAMBIA RIVER, THEY VENTURED INTO THE JUNGLE AND CAPTURED SEVERAL GORILLAS, WHICH THEY DESCRIBED AS "GREAT HAIRY NATIVES OF A STRANGE RACE." THE GORILLAS AMAZED AND TERRIFIED THE CARTHAGINIANS BY THEIR PRODIGIOUS STRENGTH AND VICIOUSNESS AND CAUSED SO MUCH HAVOC ON SHIPBOARD THAT THEY HAD TO BE KILLED.

16 DAYS SAIL BEYOND CAPE VERDE **HANNO** DECIDED HE HAD GONE FAR ENOUGH AND TURNED THE PROWS OF HIS GALLEYS TOWARD CARTHAGE. AT LAST THE WEARY VOYAGERS REACHED THEIR HOME PORT WHERE THE STORY OF THEIR TRAVELS WAS RECEIVED WITH WONDER...THANKFUL FOR HIS SAFE RETURN, **HANNO** PRESENTED THE TROPHIES TAKEN BY THE EXPEDITION, INCLUDING THE STUFFED SKINS OF THE SLAIN GORILLAS TO THE TEMPLE OF **JUNO**...

Curse of the Lion's Skin

By ALEXANDER WALLACE

Kabba Effendi, the Ball of Filth, had enough gun powder to blow every Bonkonjo warrior to the Kraal of Everlasting Sleep. And he planned to use it . . . until George Fenton stormed into the veldt with a half-caste beauty and a Colt .45!

THE VILLAGE DRUM SHATtered into fragments the crystal silence of the morning. Its lively beat was irresistible in its promise of combat, feasting and dancing. Already the Bankonjo clans trod the jungle trails converging upon their capitol, Ugarrama. For it was the day of testing—a day when the young men must prove their manhood, their fitness for war and wedlock.

Presently old Metesa, paramount chief of the Bankonjo, sallied forth from the manse beneath the palms on his way to visit the White man. The trader's wagon was outspanned where the road met the river; a Hottentot boy was preparing the morning meal over a fire. Two fine cows, their udders swollen with milk, grazed nearby. The old chief's eyes dwelt lovingly on the animals. They were his gift to the White trader.

Metesa sighed. He regretted the loss his cows. He saw, too late, that the young trader was not to be won over by gifts and flattery, like a woman. No, he was a man to be stirred only by that which touched his

Fenton blazed away at the startled Arabs.

honor of his heart. Truly, he must find a way to the White man's heart. With such a man, what better way than the truth?

George Fenton swung his long booted legs from his cot as the chief entered the tent. His blonde hair brushed the canvas as he stood erect. Metesa returned his frank smile and sat on the stool Fenton placed for him.

"I have come," said he "To take you to the wrestling. My son, Yoso Antari, will meet the champions. It will be a good thing to look upon. You shall sit with me in the shade of my house, Ngatha."

A quizzical smile quirked the corners of Fenton's mouth as he thanked Metesa for the signal honor of that name. *Ngatha* meant the noble, the generous—a little wishful thinking on the old man's part, he guessed. But then, ever since he'd outspanned at Ugarama two weeks ago, Metesa had treated him like a tin god. Nothing had been denied him, except what he wanted most, permission to leave. The shrewd old fellow was angling for something. He'd get around to saying what it was, in time.

"I have watched your son exercising with the young men. He is as swift as the reedbuck. Doubtless he will prove worthy of such a father," Fenton said.

"To be that, he must do more than wrestle and throw the spear. That is play. He must win battles, Ngatha."

Fenton smiled inwardly. They were getting down to brass tacks now. He had begun to suspect that the old fox wanted guns.

"Surely Metesa knows the folly of war," said he. "Would he make thieves and slaves of his people like Kabba Effendi?"

Metesa spat in contempt. "It is good that you know about *him!*"

Fenton made a wry face. He knew enough about Kabba Effendi to keep clear of his country. The renegade Egyptian had seized Kazinga and, surrounded by a gang of Arab cut-throats, he ruled a third of Uganda like a feudal baron; swooping down on caravans and exacting ruinous tolls from any trader that chanced to come his way. There was an ugly story about a trader, Peaks by name, who, having had his arms and legs broken, was left on the shore of a lake as food for crocodiles. Mahdi fanaticism might be Kabba's persuasion but blood-lust and plunder was his instinct. But what was Metesa driving at? He tried a shot in the dark:

"It will not be easy to drive Kabba Effendi from his stronghold, Kazinga," he said.

"You see into my heart, Ngatha!"

Fenton shook his head: "It's not lawful to trade in guns."

"Ha!" Metesa spat. "It is a foolish law. Kabba Effendi has powder and guns—"

"So he has," Fenton admitted. "But that is because evil men—"

"I hear you!" the old man interposed. "Bad men sell guns to bad men. It is so. Well then, let good men sell guns to good men and good will be strong as evil!"

"Hm-m," murmured Fenton, groping for an answer.

Metesa leaned forward, pleading: "Hear me, Ngatha! You know that Antari was king at Kazinga before Kabba drove us out with his guns. But do you know who was captain of his impis? I was that man, Ngatha. Yes, I, who have won many battles, ago. Well, we could not stand against his guns. I saw my king slain and when all was over I fled into the forest with his man-child. I came to Ugarama. There are but two roads into our valley, as you know. I taught the Bankonjo how to make the passes strong against Kabba. Oh, I am a thorn in his side, but he cannot draw me out! And what of Antari's son? You will see him wrestle today, Ngatha. He is Yoso, not mine, but a king's son!" The old warrior paused for breath, his eyes flashing with pride.

"And I," he went on, "I have not forgotten the battle I lost. It burns in my heart. Give me guns, Ngatha, and before I die I will set Yoso upon his father's seat!"

IN THE SILENCE that followed a crease of thought came between Fenton's eyes. He couldn't doubt Metesa's story, and to be rid of Kabba Effendi would be no small gain for traders—for the whole country in fact. But gun-running and intrigue . . .

"I will think about it, Metesa," said he slowly.

"Do so," said Metesa, with a sly smile. "I will give you much time for thought."

Fenton gave the other a quick look. The last, in plain speech meant that he'd not be

allowed to leave Ugarama until he pledged the guns.

The chief rose as a horn sounded outside.

"When you go for the guns," said he, "I will load your wagon twice with ivory, once for your own profit. Come now, the wrestling is about to begin."

The empty ring of ground, freshly plowed for the wrestling, baked in the morning sun. Metesa and Fenton sat on stools in the shade of the chief's house. On each side of the ring, under the slooping eaves of the huts and in the shade of the palms, sat the women, their heads shaven except for a dark cluster of curls on the top. The male non-contestants squatted or stood in close packed groups about their chief.

Splendid young men were called up for Fenton's inspection, the champions of the visiting clans. Their bodies smelled of palm oil and glistened in the sun.

Metesa rose and stepped out into the sunlight and clamor. The drums, the voices of men, women and children blended in wild acclaim.

"Metesa—Ha-a-a-!"

The chief's lifted hand commanded silence. There was to be no anger. Let the man who showed anger be driven from the village by the blows of women.

Metesa returned to his seat. The drums rolled.

Several wrestlers ran into the ring. Soon the dust rose as young bodies strained, writhed and fell locked together in combat. To score, a man's shoulders must be placed squarely on the ground. When this happened a man with a little iron bell gave tongue and there was a rustling of grass bustles, the flash and jingle of bangles as the women of the victor's clan sprang to their feet and shrilled his praise.

Fenton watched Yoso. The young prince wore a scarlet breech-cloth and a wide belt of beads. Muscles flowed under his oiled satin skin. When he bent his knee, in the conventional pasture of challenge, it was with all the grace of a danseur interpreting a lover's pleasing. Repeatedly he ran into the ring, but as often as he did so, the challenged shook his head and turned away. At last he stood apart with folded arms, a black Apollo wrapped in a flame of manly pride.

"The champions fear your son, Metesa," observed Fenton.

"It is a pity, Ngatha. I could see him thrown. 'It is good to ruffle the crest of youth.' "

A slow smile came to Fenton's face. He rose: "Youth must be served," said he, unbuckling his belt and stripping off his shirt. "I'll try a fall with the young buck myself."

Metesa jumped up, consternation on his face: "It is not seemly!" he protested. "You are my guest."

Fenton laughed, pointing to the crowded ring side. "Are not all these people your guests, Metesa?"

"True. But—"

"But you think that the boy will throw me; that I will be angry and you will not get the guns. Is it so?"

"You see into my heart, Ngatha."

Fenton grinned at him. "Be at rest, Metesa. I put the guns at stake. If Yoso throws me, I will go for them. If he does not, let there be no more talk of guns. And tomorrow you will give me leave to go. Is it agreed?"

Metesa's shrewd eyes appraised Fenton and flickered doubtfully.

"Do you doubt the boy's mettle?" wondered Fenton.

The old man smiled: "I neither doubt Yoso's mettle nor your honor. It is agreed, Ngatha."

Fenton removed his boots and strode out into the ring. Silence came to the host as he bent his knee before Yoso Antari. The young warrior looked shocked. Metesa's voice rang out:

"The White lord honors us! Clear the ground!"

The drums stopped. All eyes came to rest on the two young giants facing each other in the centre of the ring. Wise old men whispered together, debating the quality of the pair. Of the same height, narrow-hipped; deep of chest and broad-shouldered, they were evenly matched. The one with skin like oiled ebony; the other with skin the color of ripe corn. Wagers were made—a goat against a sack of rice; a daughter against her bride-price.

"I have promised guns if you throw me, Yoso," said Fenton.

Yoso's laugh was deep and pleasant. "You have nothing to lose, Ngatha. Your

heart will not be in it as mine is," he said, smiling slightly.

They came together, shoulder to shoulder, with wide-spread arms and locked hands. As a clean trial of strength, it was beautiful to watch. Powerful muscles knotted, strained and quivered, but not an inch of ground was yielded, and each knew that he had met his equal.

Yoso's oiled body put Fenton at a disadvantage. When they closed, he could not retain his hold and he was forced to defensive tactics. As light-footed as a cat he beat off a series of swift attacks. But, sooner or later, he knew he must come to grips. He saw himself on the way to Ishango for the guns. It might just as well be sooner as later, he thought. Suddenly he attacked.

A CRY WENT up from the watchers as they saw their champion lifted shoulder high. The lithe body arched in Fenton's arms, powerful legs twined about his middle. They went down together. Fenton was on top, but the oiled body seemed to flow through his hands. Yoso's legs lifted him and flopped him over. Before he could worm over onto his stomach, he felt his shoulders touch the ground. But the bell did not ring. Yoso was still straining to turn him over.

"You have scored, Yoso!" panted Fenton.

Yoso sprang erect, extending his hand to help Fenton to his feet. There was frank admiration in his eyes.

"You are the better man," he said. "If your body had been oiled I could not have scored."

Together they crossed the ring and came to stand before Metesa.

"Is it enough?" demanded the chief.

"Ngatha's body was not oiled, my father."

A gleam of pride came into the old man's eyes: "That is well said my son. But he did not ask for oil. What do *you* say Ngatha?"

Fenton grinned ruefully: "I say it was fairly done, Metesa. Load my wagon with your ivory. I will trek before sun-down."

As Fenton strode toward his wagon Yoso's eyes followed him.

"There is a strange one," he observed. "I think his heart is too big for trading."

Metesa nodded his head sagely: "All white men are strange, my son *Aie*, they are not real people."

To a man possessed by the restless spirit of wanderlust, one reason for doing a thing is as good as another, so long as it carries with it no suggestion of permanent settlement. Intrigue was not Fenton's instinct nor was trade, for that matter, but it never occurred to him to welch on his bargain with Metesa. As he saw it, he'd have been kept at Ugarama, a virtual prisoner, for as long as it took to wear down his opposition by sheer persistence and boredom. He had thought to cut short Metesa's importunities; but he had lost the throw, and that was that.

He could get the guns at Ishango, where there was a Dutch trader named Van Dirk with an elastic conscience and a very pretty Armenian wife. He recalled having spent a pleasant evening with Van Dirk's family, romping with his numerous, olive-skinned offspring.

But that had been several years ago, and there were things about Ishango less pleasant to remember. With ivory selling at ten shillings a pound, greedy eyes would bulge at the sight of a wagon load of prime tusks.

The trick would be to get out of Ishango without getting his throat cut.

He was following the course of the Semliki. An escort of twenty Bakonjos under Yoso's leadership marched ahead of his jolting wagon. Hans, his Hottentot *voorloper*, coaxed the straining oxen over the uneven ground.

As the sun sank into the forest a veil of mist was withdrawn from the East. The snow-capped peaks of Margherita and Alexander, twin sovereigns of the fabled Mountains of the Moon, showed their naked beauty and flushed red in the last rays of the sun.

Fenton sent Hans forward to call Yoso:

"We will outspan at the next clearing," said he as Yoso fell into step beside him. "Two days' march will bring me to Ishango. I think it is best that you return to Ugarama tomorrow. Who knows where Kabba Effendi's spies are?"

"He would not know me if he saw me, Ngatha. Metesa kept his secret well, even from me. Perhaps you knew my father, Ngatha?"

"No, and it would have been better for

me if I'd never met his son!" said Fenton dryly.

"You will have no cause to regret it when I am on my father's seat, Ngatha. My shield will cover you and yours. And," he added with a frank smile, "not only because of the guns."

"I do not doubt it, Yoso. I am proud to call you friend and—"

Fenton froze in his tracks. He had caught the glint of steel in the bush that flanked one side of the trail. He sent Yoso sprawling with a sudden thrust of his shoulder, and flung himself face down on the ground. His gun was out before he hit the dirt, but a ragged volley of musket fire drowned out his warning shot. Lead slugs whistled over his head. He saw Hans pitch forward. One of the oxen fell to its knees. A cloud of black powder smoke billowed out from the green of the bush. He could see nothing. In a cold rage, he emptied his Colt into the bush, and started to re-load. A white-robed figure leaped through the smoke and rushed upon him, wielding a knife like a small sickle. Light flashed across his eyes. The Arab screamed and fell backwards with Yoso's spear driven clean through him.

By the time Fenton had re-loaded, a circle of Arabs had formed around them. Black eyes watched them, glinting coldly from behind the muzzles of Snider muskets with bores the size of small cannon. The occasional report of a gun came from the direction of the river. Evidently those of his escort who had survived the ambush had taken to the river. Fenton looked around the grim circle of faces and swore wholeheartedly. Kabba Effendi's cut-throats! There was no doubting it.

"Yoso," he said in a whisper, "You are my servant Nkoi—Nkoi from Mombasa. Remember!" He slid the gun back into its holster.

"I will take your gun, Mr. Fenton," a voice wheezed behind him in good English.

II

FENTON TURNED on his heel slowly. The circle had opened and a corpulent figure waddled through the gap, followed by a servant carrying a stool and umbrella. The wide green sash he wore about his belly, emphasized his gross obesity. His flabby jowls were pendulous—sickly yellow in color and gashed by a red full-lipped mouth. He wheezed asthmatically as he eased his bulk onto the stool. The native name—Lots of Fat—came to Fenton's mind and he knew that he looked upon Kabba Effendi for the first time.

Fenton's hand went to his holster. Instantly a dozen guns were aimed at his heart.

He grinned and flung the Colt at the Egyptian's feet.

Small black eyes blinked at him.

"You are scarcely civil, Mr. Fenton."

"Am I expected to thank you for shooting my people!" retorted Fenton hotly.

"You have yourself to blame for it." Kaba folded puffed jewelled hands patting his heaving stomach. "Had you sought my permission to trade in these parts, this unfortunate incident would not have happened".

"The permission of the local chief is enough, Effendi. This is not your territory."

"I do not deny it but it has been reported to me that you have undertaken to purchase guns for an old enemy of mine. What do you say to that, Mr. Fenton?"

Fenton lied boldly. "I say that you have been misinformed, Effendi. I am on my way to the coast to buy a boiler and machinery for a local chief who fancies a steamboat to sail on the lake, and—"

"Wallai! But you lie glibly, Fenton!" Kabba turned his attention to Yoso:

"What is your name? What is your village?" he asked suddenly in the language of the Bankonjo.

Fenton held his breath. Yoso looked at the Egyptian blankly, then turned to Fenton:

"What does the great lord say, Bwana?" he asked in Swahili.

Fenton found it hard to suppress an approving grin. Good boy, Yoso!

"Nkoi is Swahili," he answered for Yoso. "He comes from—"

"Let him speak for himself!" rasped Kabba. "Where did you come from, boy?"

"From Mombasa, Lord."

Kabba's beady eyes swept over Yoso's figure.

"You are tall for a Swahili. You do not look like one."

"My mother was Bankonjo," said Yoso proudly.

"So!" Kabba's head shot forward. "Your

mother was Bankonjo, but you do not understand her tongue!"

"She died when I was young, lord. I lived with my father's people."

Kabba's face turned purple. He gasped and was seized by a fit of coughing.

"God be merciful!" He clutched at his headman's arm who stood beside him. "Am I surrounded with liars? Ahmed, have you captured none of these dogs? Is there no man to speak the truth?"

The headman bent his head and whispered something in his ear. Kabba sat silent for a moment, fingering his flabby chin, evidently turning over what he had heard in his mind. His black eyes fixed on Fenton's face.

"Ahmed tells me that those of your people who have not been killed have escaped across the river."

Fenton muttered a silent prayer of thanksgiving.

"You are English," Kabba continued. "It is not my wish to offend your Government."

So he was an Englishman! Fenton decided to talk like one.

"Shooting her Majesty's subjects while engaged in lawful——"

Kabba held up his hand. "I have decided to accept your story provisionally — only provisionally," said he with peculiar emphasis. "Further, I have decided to dispose of your ivory at Ishango. Also, I will send to the West for the machinery that you say you have undertaken to purchase. Your chief wants to sail on the lake. Well, by God, he shall! Meanwhile, you will return with me to Kazinga to await the arrival of your steamboat, Mr. Fenton."

Kabba rose. A squad of Arabs formed up on either side of Fenton and Yoso. The order to march was given.

"Ngatha," Yoso whispered as they trudged along. "We have lied our way into the lion's mouth."

Fenton laughed. "Surely Nkoi, the Swahili, will know how to lie his way out again!"

"The servant is but the shadow of his master," retorted Yoso with a broad grin. "But my father, Metesa, will not think so well of you when he gets a boiler instead of guns, Ngatha."

Fenton shook his head ruefully. "The devil take Metesa and his guns! He gets a boiler or we get our heads loped off neatly."

Kazinga, the High Place, overlooked the valley of the Katonga. Kabba Effendi's house crowned the flat top of the hill. It stood in the centre of park-like grounds, surrounded by a high hedge of thorn bush. Outside the hedge, there were several groups of well-built huts, occupied by his favored henchmen, and against a face of rock, there was a long, rectangular building, a combined arsenal and barracks for his janissaries.

THE NATIVE TOWN sprawled down the valley. To the north the country was covered with elephant grass, but where the plateau sloped down to the Katonga, plantations of banana, pineapple and coffee flourished side by side. At the foot of the hill there was an open market place. There were no stalls. Fruit, meat and merchandise were dumped wherever there was space. From late afternoon until sundown, wiry, brown, Bairu planters, Arabs and Egyptians—Mahdi fanatics, for the greater part—wandered among the haphazard piles.

Fenton was given a hut on the hill. He had the freedom of the town, but there was a catch in it. Life wasn't worth a plugged dime in the native town. To venture into it was to invite some fanatical son of the Prophet to clinch his hope of Paradise by slipping a knife between his Christian ribs. On the hill, in Kabba Effendi's shadow, he was reasonably safe.

Why Kabba chose to protect him kept Fenton awake at night. Ostensibly he was waiting for a boiler, but he was pretty sure that the astute Egyptian had not been wholly taken in by that story. There was more behind it—something that smelled of treachery. He saw himself caught in a web of African intrigue, tricked or compelled into betrayal of his friends.

Towards sunset on the fourth day after their arrival at the town, Fenton was called to the Kazinga.

"One thing is certain," said he to Yoso before he left their hut, "Kabba does not know you for your father's son."

Yoso's eyes flashed, his hand touched the hilt of his knife:

"Let me go with you, Ngatha. Let me get close to him—"

"No!" said Fenton firmly. "I am not

eager to die. Take your hand off your knife and sharpen your wits—by God, it's going to take more than I've got to get out of this!"

Kabba Effendi received Fenton in a large, square room, with a white-washed mud walls. There were four entrances into the audience chamber, one in the centre of each of the walls with doors of cedar intricately carved. There were no windows. Oil lamps swung by chains from the low ceiling and lighted the room dimly. Kabba was alone, but Fenton guessed that eyes were watching him from behind the carved lattice of the doors.

The Egyptian's great bulk reclined on a cushioned divan. He sat up as Fenton approached. He puffed out his lips, waving aside Fenton's formal greeting with an impatient gesture.

"I have disposed of your ivory," he began abruptly. "Five thousand pounds in English bank notes." He drew a package out of his tunic. "The money is yours," said he with his eyes fixed on Fenton's face.

Fenton took the package and swallowed hard. Conscious of Kabba's eyes, he thumbed the crisp notes and did some mental arithmetic.

"The ivory is not mine, Effendi," said he. "And I'd say it was worth about half this sum."

"A thing is worth what a man is willing to pay for it, Fenton."

Fenton's chin jutted out. "What d'you think you're buying?" he demanded.

Kabba's eyes disappeared into rolls of fat; he shook with inward mirth.

"I am not buying a steamboat, Fenton. Let us say that I am paying you not to buy one for your friend, Metesa, and a trifle more."

"And the trifle more, Effendi?"

Kabba's face sobered. "I have been told that you undertook to buy guns for Metesa because you lost a wrestling match. That is nonsense! I cannot believe it. For one things, I will pay to know the truth of this matter."

Fenton's eyes widened. Kabba's spies were efficient.

"It's a lot to pay for a trifle," said he, to cover his confusion.

"Come, Fenton! Come! I am not a fool. Harry Johnston, the new British Commissioner, has signed a treaty with the King of Buganda. All Uganda is to have a constitution. It is his policy to recognize only the authority of hereditary chiefs—"

"And you are not an hereditary chief," Fenton interrupted with a smile. He was beginning to understand.

Kabba's fat finger shot out, pointing at him: "And you," he wheezed, "are not a trader. You are Johnston's agent and you buy guns for my enemy, with his sanction!"

SO THAT was it! Fenton's attention became fixed on one of the swinging lamps. He was up to his neck in one of the intrigues that had convulsed the country for the past twenty years,—or Kabba thought he was. He knew not what had kept him alive. George Fenton, the trader, would have had his throat cut long ago, but George Fenton, the supposed British Agent, was a sheep in the British Lion's Skin.

"You see that I am well informed," Kabba's voice recalled his thoughts.

"Much better than I am," said Fenton, smiling. "I haven't touched the Coast in years. It's all news to me."

"Merciful God!" Kabba's mouth opened in admiration. "You lie convincingly, Fenton. But enough of it! You are a man of the world. I pay those who serve me and I pay them well."

Twin spots of anger came to burn on Fenton's cheeks: "I had a boy called Hans," said he coldly. "The vultures have picked his bones clean by this time. And I knew a trader named Peaks—"

"*You* knew Peaks!" Kabba's eyes bored into Fenton's face. There was silence for a moment while he tugged at his lower lip.

"I may be mistaken about you," he said at last.

Fenton held out the package of bank notes: "You are," said he.

Kabba waved the package aside: "I have not made up my mind about you yet," said he. "Keep the money until I have." He held up his hand as Fenton opened his mouth to speak:

"Say nothing in haste, my friend! If you choose to be my friend, you will not find me niggardly. Return to your quarters and think about it, Mr. Fenton. I will give you three more days."

Fenton rose: "What will happen if I

decide not to accept your generosity, Effendi?"

Kabba spread his hands: "You are at liberty to leave the Kazinga whenever you choose to do so."

"I see what you mean," Fenton smiled. "I can stay here or I can go down into the town and get my throat cut."

Kabba heaved his bulk to his feet. He shrugged his shoulders and puffed out his lips: "I cannot force you to accept my protection. Your Government could not blame me for what happens if you refuse it. And if, as you say, you are gunrunning on your own account,—"

"Did I say I was gunrunning, Effendi?"

Kabba's eyes bulged with sudden anger: "Take care!" he wheezed. "If I was sure of you—Wallai—" He burst out into Arabic, shaking his fist in Fenton's face.

Understanding none of it, Fenton listened to the tirade with an aggravating grin on his face.

"Ta'ala hina!" Kabba screamed. One of the doors opened; a pair of scared-looking Arabs came in answer to his loud, angry summons.

"Take him out of my sight!" he gasped. "Remember," he shouted, as Fenton was led out, "I give you three days!"

Night had come by the time Fenton had been conducted beyond the gates of the Kazinga. His hut lay on the East side of the hill. Left to himself, he followed a narrow trail that ran down between the huts of Kabba's henchmen. Fires glowed in the market place below. The town's wakefulness puzzled Fenton for a moment. Then he remembered that it was the spring equinox, a significant season for the African. There would be three days of feasting and dancing, climaxed by the ritual of expulsion of evil. Some poor devil would be smelled out by the wizards, blamed for all the bad luck that had come to the tribe during the year. The Bairu disposed of their victims by breaking their arms and legs. Fenton's nerves jumped as the thought struck him. Kabba had given him three days! Why three days? Was there a connection between the time limit and the Bairu ritual? He broke out into a cold sweat as the conviction grew on him that Kabba had meant him to understand that there was. He could die as Peaks had died, or he could betray old Metesa into some bloody trap that Kabba had not yet seen fit to divulge.

III

OVER THE FIRST shock, and feeling the smart of impotency, Fenton drove his fist into the palm of his hand and sat down on a rock beside the pathway. When a man's wits measured his life span, it was, he told himself, time to do some heavy thinking. He pulled the package of bank notes out of his breast pocket and thumbed them. Obviously a bribe. But for what? Kabba was more than half convinced that he was a British Agent sent to negotiate a treaty with Metesa. That was the main point that carried all the loose ends with it. Well, why not keep him thinking so? Why not play the role of a British Agent sorely tempted by bribery? Fenton smiled grimly. With his life at stake, he ought to make a damned convincing job of it. The Lion's Skin had protected him so far, it might—

A woman's scream brought him to his feet with a startled exclamation. The sound of running feet approached him rapidly. The woman came racing up the path, her long robe caught up at the waist and with slender brown thighs flashing in the moonlight. A tall Arab, her irate husband, Fenton supposed, was on her flying heels, yelling threats and curses.

"Stop him, for the love of Allah!" gasped the woman as she sped past Fenton, headed for the Kazinga.

Years of treking from kraal to kraal had taught Fenton to turn his back on things that shocked his sensibilities, but he never had got used to wife-beating. As the woman's pursuer came abreast of him he thrust out his foot. The big Arab shot through the air, his white bournows billowing out like a sail. He sprawled on the trail. He got up, spitting out dirt and invective. Fenton recognized Ahmed, Kabba's headman. He thought of his Hottentot, Hans, and his grey eyes glinted.

"Son of a dog!" said he in Swahilli: "Can you beat a man?"

Amhed gasped at the insult: "Mini wad harama—! I am a she-dog if I do not rip your guts!" His knife slashed.

Fenton side-stepped the upward stroke aimed at his stomach. The headman's chin collided with Fenton's first as his lunge

carried him forward. Ahmed's head was jolted back. Pivoting on his toe, Fenton let drive with all his weight. It was a terrible blow and he felt the shock of it up to his shoulder. The Arab crumpled on the path. For a horrible moment, Fenton thought he had killed him. He bent over the still form. Ahmed was still breathing.

Fenton shook his head in self-reproach. "This makes it worse," he muttered. "As if you didn't have trouble enough!"

When he reached his quarters, Yoso was preparing a meal. The hut was full of smoke and Fenton preferred to sit outside. With a grim face, Yoso set the food before him and stood watching while Fenton sampled it.

"It is woman's work," he said defensively. "I have done my best."

Fenton grinned. "It is not bad for a king's son."

Yoso squatted beside him. "While you were gone," he said, "I walked around the hill. My father is wise; it could not be taken without guns."

Fenton frowned: "I shall not be able to get the guns I promised, Yoso."

"Who will blame you for that, Ngatha?"

"A promise is a promise, nevertheless."

"With some men that is so. I see that it troubles *you*, Ngatha."

Fenton was silent for a moment. "The English have come to Uganda. There is a man called Johnston—"

Yoso looked up quickly. The Sekikali Johnston? The drums have spoken of him."

"Good! I think Kabba Effendi seeks to make a treaty with the Sekikali."

Yoso jumped to his feet. His eyes flashed: "That is not our custom! Only the hereditary chiefs may make treaties. I, not Kabba, am the rightful chief—"

"Among my people it is said that possession is nine points of the law," interposed Fenton. "If Metesa and you were killed who would stand between Kabba and the kingship?"

"But who will kill us? Not Kabba Effendi! Once before he tried to do so, but we are strong in our hills. Our bowmen are a match for his guns among the rocks."

"True, but he will try again. And this time he will try a trick."

"What trick, Ngatha?"

"I cannot tell yet. But, say now, if I knew his plan, could you make your way to Ungarama and give a warning to Metesa?"

"Who looks at a servant twice, Ngatha? Today I walked on the hill. No man challenged me, but you are watched. You could not leave this place."

Fenton smiled wryly. "I am not a child. I shall know what do when the times comes. Let Yoso be ready to go when I say so. I cannot send the guns I promised. But perhaps I can send Kabba's plan before him. Like your cooking, Yoso, it is the best I can do."

Early on the following morning, Fenton was called to the citadel. The summons was no surprise to him. It was, he guessed, the natural outcome of his reckless meddling in the domestic affairs of Kabba Effendi's subjects. But he was not alarmed. He had thought things out during the night. Even his clash with Ahmed might be turned to good advantage. His eye was bright and his nerves tingled with more than the crisp freshness of the morning. He laughed softly as he entered the garden of the Kazinga. George Fenton, the trader, was dead, or, by every rule, he ought to be. A long life to George Fenton, British Agent!

Angry voices reached his ears as he awaited admission outside the audience chamber. A woman's voice, melodious but passionately accusing, was the dominating note. Fenton grinned; evidently peace had not yet been restored to Ahmend's household.

THE GROUP fell silent as Fenton was conducted in. The headman stood on Kabba's right hand; the woman on his left. She wore a long, full skirt of yellow silk with a scarlet bodice, like a man's waistcoat. All she possessed of wealth, she wore or her person. Jewelled pendants flashed in the dim light, and silver coins jingled when she turned her head. Dark, flashing eyes scrutinized Fenton over the edge of her veil. Kabba Effendi scowled at him.

"What's this I am told?" he demanded. "Ahmed says you have beaten him near to death. And this woman sits on my doorstep, refusing to leave until you have spoken for her."

Fenton looked at the woman, puzzled. What could he say for her? "I acted without thought, Effendi," said he. "I am willing to pay for any injury done."

The head man broke out into voluble Arabic: Kabba silenced him.

"Speak Swahili," he commanded. "Bawan Fenton does not understand Arabic, or so he says. Ahmend, you are a fool. I cannot make the woman love you. Sell her."

"But she is possessed of a devil!" the headman pleaded. "Who would buy her? She bites and scratches. And her tongue! Allah!" Ahmed lifted his hands in dismay. "Tell her that she must come with me. I will find a way to tame—"

"No! No!" The girl flung herself at Kabba's feet. "I will not go with him! I will not have him touch me I will kill myself— My blood will—"

"Silence!" roared Kabba. "You will do as I say, girl!"

Fenton fished the bank notes out of his pocket: "I will buy the girl, Effendi," he offered.

In silence three pairs of eyes fastened on his face. Kabba's gaze shifted to the bank notes.

"So!" said he. "And you will pay for her with my money, it seems!"

Fenton's eyebrows arched: "From what was said yesterday, I thought it was agreed—"

Kabba brought his hands together with a resounding clap: "What was agreed?"

"Well," said Fenton, "If I saw that you were strong, your authority firmly established; if I saw that Metesa was weak—"

Kabba waved his hand, his fat face wrinkled with a knowing smile: "Say no more, my friend! We understand each other. The money is yours. Do with it as you will. Come, stand up, girl! Let Fenton Effendi see before he buys. Unveil!"

The girl rose and stood facing Fenton: Her tapered fingers fumbling with a jewelled clasp. The muslin veil fell and Fenton caught his breath. She was a beauty! Olive skin and Caucasian features—He'd seen nothing like her in Africa. A faint smile turned the corners of her red mouth before her gaze was lowered before Fenton's stare.

"Do you want her?" Kabba's voice cut in.

"Well—" Fenton gulped. He felt the girl's eyes and his cheeks burned. Damn it! He wasn't really buying her. She'd understand—"Yes," he finished weakly.

"Good!" Kabba turned to Ahmed. "How much?" he demanded.

"She is very beautiful, Effendi. Her flesh is firm. She is well formed and she cost me much money."

Fenton groaned inwardly.

Kabba shook his finger at Ahmed: "You lie! You stole her from Ishango when you sold the ivory. And you say she is a devil! Would you cheat my friend?"

"God forbid, Effendi!"

"Well then, take twenty-five pounds. Ten for the woman and fifteen for the blow Fenton Effendi dealt you. Now go!"

Ahmed salamed and backed out of the room with Fenton's money clutched in his hand.

"What is your name, girl?" asked Kabba.

"It is Mavona, Effendi."

"Will you go in peace with Fenton Effendi, Mavona?"

The girl shot a side-long glance at Fenton's face: "You have ordered it so, Effendi. What is left for a woman to say?"

"Merciful God! You had much to say a while ago!" Kabba's belly shook with laughter. "But you like this one, eh? You are a good girl. Be kind to my friend. Leave us now, Mavona!"

The girl bent her head submissively. Then, very deliberately, she went to Fenton, lifted his hand and touched it with her forehead. Without speaking, she glided from the room.

Kabba chuckled happily. "May she bring you peace and comfort, my friend!" He waved Fenton to a seat, and clapped his hands. A servant entered and served sweet-meats and coffee, sweetened to the consistency of syrup,

"So!" said Kabba, slobbering over the sweet stuff. "I was not wrong. You are Johnston's agent."

"Unofficially, of course," murmured Fenton.

"Of course," Kabba chuckled. "No Government recognizes its agents. What they do, they do at their own risk. And if they are wise, they do well for themselves, eh, my friend?"

"If the risk of exposure is not too great," Fenton smiled. "Our trouble is Metesa. The Commissioner will be inclined to recognize his claim."

"Wallai! I know that!"

"Therefore Metesa must not be permit-

ted to appeal to the Commissioner."

"We see eye to eye, my friend. Go on!"

Fenton shrugged and smiled. "I can go no further, Effendi. I see what must be done, but I don't see how it can be done."

Kabba leaned forward and patted Fenton's knee: "But I do. I saw it on the first day we met. You are the man who will destroy my enemy."

A THRILL of alarm made Fenton's nerves jump. Kabba leaned back on his cushion with crafty eyes fixed on Fenton's face: "I have turned many a trick in my time," he boasted. "But this one I like the best. You agreed to deliver guns to Metesa, did you not?"

"There was some talk of it," replied Fenton cautiously.

"Well, then, you will deliver the guns, my friend, but they will be loaded guns. My best men will be your porters. With you at the head of the safari, Metesa will suspect nothing. Once through the pass—a volley or two, a puff of smoke and all will be over for Metesa!" He leaned back with a self-approving smile.

Fenton's first impulse was to drive his fist into Kabba's leering face. To hide his anger he dropped his coffee cup and stooped to pick it up. In a game of wits with the crafty Egyptian he was out of his depth. Kabba had left nothing to chance. With subtle cunning he had evolved a scheme that, as independent trader or British Agent, left Fenton with no choice but to commit himself to black-hearted treachery and in a way that would keep him constantly under Kabba's eye. Fenton saw that he had one card left—a black ace in the hole—Yoso. When he straightened up his features were composed, he even managed a smile.

"It is a clever trick, Effendi," he approved, but surely you will not send your Arabs with me; Metesa would smell a trap."

Kabba rose and placed a fat hand on Fenton's shoulder: "Nothing has been overlooked, my friend. "Loads of guns and powder have been made up in the armory. I shall serve out guns to certain of the Bairu I can trust; others will make up your safari. You will approach Ugarama from the South end of the valley, so that you will seem to come from Ishango. Ahmed will command them. I and my Arabs will close the North end of the valley so that none shall escape."

"The plan is worthy of you, Effendi," said Fenton, getting to his feet with a wry smile.

Kabba patted his shoulder. "You make me happy, my friend. Wallai, there was a time when I thought I must kill you. But that is over. Serve me well and you will find me generous. Be ready to march as soon as the Bairu have done with their heathen rites."

Yoso was waiting for Fenton outside the hut when he returned. He grinned broadly as Fenton came up to him.

"You did well to buy the woman, Ngatha. She cooks well."

"What! Did she come here?"

"Where else would she go?" asked Yoso in astonishment. "You bought her—or does she lie?"

"True, I bought her but—Lord!" Fenton swore and went into the hut.

The girl was working over the stone hearth in the centre of the hut. She rose as he entered, her dark eyes smiling above her veil.

"You cannot stay here, Mavona," said Fenton awkwardly. "You must go away."

The girl came to stand before him, her expression puzzled.

"It is not the custom of my people to buy women," said Fenton gently.

Her eyes flashed: "Then why *did* you buy me, Effendi?"

Why did he do what he had done? Fenton swore underneath his breath. God only knew he didn't. Doubtless there was a shadow of reason for his actions. He'd bought her to impress Kabba Effendi; a practical demonstration of pretended duplicity. Yes, that was it. That—and the girl's helplessness and the seductive, romantic flavor of the East that hovered around her like a kind of halo. Yes, he could still believe in his own sanity.

"As you know, Mavona, I fought with Ahmend. I made trouble for myself and for you, and I bought my way out of it."

Manova bent her head: "Then I have found no favor in your eyes, Effendi," said she.

Anger burned on Fenton's cheeks. It struck him that there was more than submission in the girl's poise. If it wasn't

mockery, it was very damn close to it.

"If you send me away," her voice quavered—"Where will I go? What will I do?" Tears came into her eyes.

"Hell!" Fenton exploded and rushed out of the hut.

Yoso was sleeping with his back to the hut. Fenton shook him awake: "You must get rid of that girl, Yoso," said he.

Yoso blinked at him in puzzlement. "She will not go, Ngatha. Listen, she weeps!"

"Then go talk to her, you grinning ape!" snapped Fenton, and strode up the path. "Say that she can stay." he flung back over his shoulder.

Yoso's puzzled gaze followed Fenton's figure as he walked rapidly up the trail: "Why does he buy a woman if he doesn't want one? It's a thing unheard of!" He shrugged his broad shoulders and went into the hut.

"Do not weep, little one," said he to the girl who sat sobbing on the floor. "He will not send you away."

Mavona's sobs ceased with surprising suddenness as soon as she realized it was not Fenton who had entered the hut.

"No," she repeated with a toss of her head. "He will not send me away?"

"He is a strange man—"

"*Is* he a man?" the girl wondered.

"Truly he is. A great man," affirmed Yoso loyally. "But he is a White man, and my father, who is very wise, says that they are not real people."

The girl laughed softly. "He does not know them as well as I do."

Yoso's hand shot out and tore the veil from the girl's face. As quick as a flash she sprang back from him. Steel gleamed in her hand.

"Aie!" breathed Yoso, staring at her. "You are a devil! I think you are more than you seem!"

"That may well be, black fellow! And I am not for you!"

Yoso's deep laughter filled the hut. "Do not fear me, Little One. I see how it is with you. Ngatha has captured your heart, even as he has mine. Oh, yes! He is man enough for you! Are you woman enough for him?"

The girl uttered an angry cry. "Leave me! Go to your wonderful Ngatha and say—" She choked with rage.

Yoso grinned at her. "I go," said he. "Perhaps I will speak for you, Little One."

IV

HE FOUND Fenton seated on a rock overlooking the town. Although it was near noon, the market place was crowded. Tiny figures, diminished by distance, moved about, looking like gaudily dressed dolls. A long line of blacks marched into the town singing and with the sun flashing on their spears. A troup of mounted Arabs rode in from the north. Several wagons were outspanned beside a stream. Tents had been pitched under the shade of palms over which floated a red flag, Zanzibaris, working their way over the ancient trade route from the Zambesi to the Nile—with eyes as keen for the main chance as a vulture's for carion.

"There will be much dancing and feasting tonight, Ngatha," observed Yoso, coming to stand behind Fenton.

"So there will," Fenton replied absently; then, after a pause.

"You will go to Metesa tonight, Yoso. It is a good time. The town is full of strangers. It wil be easy for you to mingle with the crowd and slip away. You will say to Metesa—"

Briefly he outlined Kabba Effendi's plan. When he had finished, there was a long silence. Glancing up, Fenton was startled by the look of savage hatred he saw on the young warrior's face. Aware of Fenton's eyes, Yoso's grim features relaxed.

"It is well for Metesa; It is well for the Bankonjo, that you are their friend. Ngatha."

"Will you go, Yoso?"

"It is not good, Ngatha. Kabba Effendi will kill you for this!"

"It is not in my mind to die," said Fenton with a grim smile. "It may be that I will lead his safari into your country. See that your bowmen do not shoot at me."

The warrior shook his head. "You will not get so far. Kabba will see that I am gone. I think he will know why."

"I have thought of that. You will take the girl with you. I will say that you ran away with her."

Yoso chuckled: "I think you fear the woman more than Kabba. It is a good lie, but—"

Fenton jumped to his feet: "Metesa must be warned! Would you have it said that we betrayed our friends?"

"That," said Yoso calmly, "will never be said of you, Ngatha. But it may be said of me if I leave you here to die, and my father, Metesa, will be the first to say it. Oh, he will be angry! He will be like an elephant—"

"Would you see all your people slain, Yoso? It was agreed that you would go!" Fenton insisted. "Is the word of a Bankonjo prince no better than another man's?"

Yoso's eyes flashed proudly. "I will go, as agreed, Ngatha. And," he added with savage vehemence: "I will come back! I will rip open that Skin of Filth who calls himself Kabba Effendi!"

That night when the Kazinga lay silvered in the moonlight, Fenton and his two companions glided through the shadows toward a steep descent that led down to the town. Drums pulsed in the market place. The clans, each gathered about its own fire, danced in a ruddy glow, while a circle of onlookers clapped their hands and chanted tonelessly. A discordant volume of sound floated upward and was diffused over the hill-top by a cool breeze.

The Arab aristocracy had descended from the Kazinga to the town, but not to mingle with the infidel. They were being feasted by the Zanzibaris traders from whose tents came the shrill, plaintive notes of reed instruments and the faint thud and jingle of timbrels. On the hill itself all was quiet except for the occasional shouts of the watch calling to each other from the four corners of the Kazinga.

Fenton drew his companions into the shadows where the trail dipped down between clumps of flowering thornbush. Both his nerves and his temper were on edge. He was having trouble with Mavona. At first the girl had refused blankly to go with Yoso. Why should she go, and in secret? Was he not Kabba Effendi's friend? He had argued with her throughout the long afternoon. His proprietory right to obedience was the only thing she did not dispute, and in the end he had been forced to assert it. But it was the very thing he had sought to avoid. He felt that he had lost the argument. She had had her way. How far could he trust her? She had to be told enough to make her understand. He groaned inwardly and drew the girl into the shadows.

"Mavona," said he, "Kabba Effendi is my enemy."

"So much is plain," said she.

"Oh, is it? Well, then, Akoi will take you to Metesa—"

"Who is Yoso's foster-father," interposed the girl.

Yoso gasped: "You know me, girl?"

A cold chill ran down Fenton's spine. It flashed across his mind that his meeting with the girl had been pre-arranged by Kabba. It was too fantastic, yet his grasp on reality was rapidly deteriorating into a spongy state that could absorb anything.

He caught the girl's arm. "How do you know this," he demanded.

THE GIRL came close to him—so close that he could feel her breath upon his cheek. She had loosened her veil and as Fenton looked down into the perfect oval of her face, an inward image—the mere hint of remembrance, clouded his eyes. He'd seen her before, somewhere. But her palpable presence, the odor of musk and red, parted lips, drove recollection from his mind.

The girl laughed softly: "When my lord comes to me at Ugarama, I will tell him that."

Fenton's grip tightened on her arm: "You will tell me now," said he tensely. "Why did you—" He broke off.

A loosened stone came rolling down the path. With an exclamation Yoso started up the trail. Fenton caught his arm and dragged him back.

"Away, Yoso!" he urged. Leave him to me! Quickly, before it is too late!" He gave the young warrior a shove, starting him down the path.

"After him!" He pushed the girl forward.

As the pair vanished into the gloom, Fenton dashed up the trail. He ran at top speed in a direct line for the Kazinga. If the stone had been loosened by one of Kabba's spies, the man, he reasoned, would run straight to his master to make his report. His only hope of delaying discovery was to get to the gates of the Kazinga first and jump on the first man that came that way. If he overtook his quarry en route, so much the better.

Keeping to the shadow of the huts, he raced through the gloom. It was all of a

quarter of a mile from the path to the gates of the Kazinga and up hill all the way. Fenton sprinted the whole of the distance. He was gasping for breath when the barrier of thornbush loomed up before him.

There was an open space in front of the gates. Fenton slackened his pace to a walk. Before he left the shadows, he stopped, searching the gloom for a moving figure. He saw no sign of one, nor could he hear anything but the throbbing of the drums to which his heart was beating a tumultuous accompaniment. Bent double, he dashed across the open ground and gained the shadow of the hedge.

Before he had quite got his wind, a tall figure approached the Kazinga, walking at a brisk pace. He came from the right direction, but evidently had followed another path. He came straight for the gates, his white garments billowing in the wind. As he came out into the moonlight. Fenton recognized him. It was Ahmed. Fenton wiped his moist hands on his shirt; he felt relieved. It would be easier to kill a man who shot from ambush and stole women. Ahmed would have a fighting chance, which was more than he'd given Hans, the Hottentot.

As the Arab came up to the gates, Fenton leaped out of the shadows. But some instinct must have warned Ahmed. He jumped back with a startled yelp, avoiding Fenton's spring by inches.

"Allah—you!" His hand flew to his knife.

Fenton whirled and rushed at him. Steel tore through his shirt and burned his skin. He caught the Arab's knife hand in both his own. Pivoting swiftly, using the other's arm as a lever, he whipped him over his shoulder. But Ahmed fought with the desperation of a man who knows that his life is at stake. As Fenton dived at him he lashed out with his feet. The kick staggered Fenton.

"Saidiga! Saidiga mimi!" Ahmed's yell for help shattered the silence.

Fenton pounced on him. Ahmed's hand still clutched his knife. For a moment they rolled on the ground with the steel between them. Shouts and running feet came from behind the hedge. Desperately Fenton fought to make an end of the struggle. Slowly he forced the Arab's own knife behind his back, then rolled him over. Ahmed gasped as his own weight drove the steel between his shoulders. Fenton was possessed of one idea—the headman must not talk. His hands grasped at Ahmed's throat, but before he could tighten his grip, he was surrounded by yelling Arabs. Brown hands clutched at him and dragged him away.

With one of Kabba's body guards clinging to each of his arms, and with cold steel pricking his spine, Fenton was propelled toward the Kazinga. Ahmed's body, borne between four of his companions, followed in his wake. As they marched up the broad pathway, his captors shouted out the news of Ahmed's fall. Figures came running from the house, torches flared among the ilicineae, palms and cedars. House servants ran up to stare at Ahmed; jabbered excitedly and cursed Fenton in half a dozen different dialects.

He was taken to the audience room. Swiftly his hands were bound behind his back. Four of his guards took up positions in front of the room's four doors, silent and watchful; each with his hand resting on the hilt of a curved knife sheathed in a colored sash. The others left the room.

Fenton waited calmly. It was useless to speculate. He felt sure of one thing only —Yoso had had time to get away. The rest hung on the thread of Ahmed's life. If the headman was capable of speech. . .

Suddenly one of the doors opened. Kabba Effendi waddled in. His face was expressionless, but his asthmatic breathing filled the room, betraying inward ferment. He came to a stand before Fenton.

"Ahmed spoke before he died," said he. There was no outburst of rage, just a cold statement of fact.

Or was it fact? Fenton smiled, but made no answer.

Kabba advanced upon him: "You have lied to me for the last time, Fenton."

HE RIPPED open Fenton's shirt and took the package of bank notes, his blowsy cheeks puffed out. He struck Fenton savagely in the face, then turned and rolled toward the door.

"Take him away!" he wheezed at the guard.

Fenton was led across the gardens to the barracks under the cliff. At the end of a long passageway they came to a door;

one of his guards opened it, revealing a black hole that smelled of damp earth and rotting wood.

"In, Infidel dog!" said the guard in Swahili. He spat in Fenton's face and gave him a shove. Fenton kicked like a half-back. The Arab gasped, doubled up and rolled on the floor. But before Fenton could turn a blow from behind felled him.

He awoke to noisesome blackness. He was bound hand and foot, stretched full length on the dirt floor. Insects crawled over his burning skin—tiny white ants, he supposed, harmless, but the bite of each was like a spot of fire.

He struggled with his bonds, but it only increased his torment; leather throngs cut into his swollen flesh. Bathed in sweat, he lay gasping for breath. The poisoned air stifled him. Vaguely wondering if there was enough oxygen to keep him alive, he sank into a kind of coma. Time ceased. By the strange inversion of delirium, thirst conjured up a vision of a cool, running stream. Beside it there was a girl. Though her back was turned to him, he knew her and he ran toward her with joy in his heart. But when she turned there was no face. Where it should have been there was black horror. He shuddered.

Fenton opened his eyes. There was a cool breeze; he could feel it on his cheeks. Struggling to a sitting position he saw light, an amorphous blur. The door to his cell was open. Someone was dragging a heavy object into the cell; labored breathing was plainly audible—a thud and a stifled curse in Bankonjo.

"Yoso!" Fenton's voice was a hoarse croak.

"Softly!" Yoso's whisper came out of the darkness. His groping hand explored Fenton's body, feeling for his bonds. Fenton was beyond feeling; his limbs were numb. He begged for water. Yoso gave him a moistened rag to chew, and then massaged his legs.

"What was it you dragged in here?" asked Fenton as life began to flow in his veins.

"One who slept while he watched and who will wake no more."

"How long have I been here?" Fenton asked suddenly.

"It was night when I left you, Ngatha. It is now night again."

"You did not go to Metesa!" he asked.

"Softly, Ngatha. The woman went in my place."

Fenton gasped: "You let her go alone! You—" He broke off, startled by his own concern for the girl. Suddenly he knew that he was more than half in love with her. In love with an Arab slave girl! He ran his hand through his hair and shook his head in the darkness.

"How did it happen, Yoso?" he asked reproachfully.

"She is more than she seems. I think, she is a witch. All through the town she talked and her words burned like fire. She shamed me. She said a child or a woman could run away to Metesa, but a man would stand by his friend—which is true, Ngatha.

"When we came to the river we found horses. They were snorting devils! But she had no fear of them. They were without seats, yet she leaped upon one and was gone like the wind. That is how I know she is a witch." Yoso affirmed his tribal fear of horseflesh emphatically, then went on:

"I came back to Kazinga. I heard what had happened to you. I hid myself in the garden. I saw them bring you here and it was easy for me to creep up—"

"Does she know what to tell Metesa?" Fenton interrupted him.

"She knows, Ngatha. She will bring my father and—"

"No!" Fenton got to his feet unsteadily. "If Metesa attacks the Kazinga without guns, your people will be slaughtered like cattle!"

"He will come, nevertheless, Ngatha. I think he would have come for you. But surely he will come for me, and he will come swiftly!"

"No, by—!" Fenton swore. "Not if we can get to him first. Help me, Yoso!"

Swiftly Fenton donned the dead Arab's robe. The disguise he knew, apart from the fact that he knew no Arabic, would deceive no one who gave him a second glance. With the savage rites of the Bairu approaching their climax, it was just possible that he might slip through the town unnoticed by the excited mob. Getting clear of the Kazinga presented an even greater difficulty. They would have to cross open ground, and when challenged by the watch, trust to their heels. Well, a man condemned

as he was, had nothing to lose in the attempt.

"All right, Yoso," said he, groping his way to the door.

V

THEY CAME out into the long passage which ran the whole length of the building. One end terminated in the cell from which they had just emerged. The metal-bound door at the far end, Fenton guessed, opened onto the courtyard of the Kazinga. A guard would surely be posted before it. There must be another outlet somewhere. The faint rumble of drums penetrated the building's mud walls, but within, all was silent. Kabba's body-guard, Fenton concluded, must have gone down to the native town to witness the consummation of the tribal rites. Suddenly he remembered Kabba Effendi's dark hint that he might be the scapegoat, the sacrificial victim in the last act of the bloody drama. A thrill of alarm quickened his pulse. It meant that they might come for him at any moment.

Swiftly he led the way up the passage. There were only four doors in the mud wall——two on either side of the passage. Fenton chose one which, if there was an exit, he judged would place the building between them and the courtyard. Putting his ear to the door he listened intently. No sound came from within.

The door was secured by a metal bar and a padlock, but the wood was cedar. The brackets which held the slots through which the bar ran were held in place by brass bolts with screw-heads. It was the weak spot and Fenton attacked it with Yoso's knife. In a few minutes he had worked the bolts loose. Combining their strength the pair pried the brackets from the soft wood. The door swung open.

Fenton went in, leaving Yoso to watch the passage. Shafts of moonlight streamed though a long, narrow opening at the far end of the large room. The opening was barred with a metal grating. There was a strong familiar odor. Fenton sniffed. Black powder—fifty pound kegs of it made ready for safari! There was a long rack of guns —smooth-bored Sniders, secured by a chain running through their trigger guards. Small arms hung from hooks above them; wicked-looking knives and several old-fashioned Colt revolvers. Fenton whistled softly; evidently he had blundered into the Kazinga's armory. He searched for one of the Colts and spun its well-greased cylinder. Cartridges? He fumbled in his shirt for the matches he kept wrapped in oil skin against emergencies. He was about to strike one but changed his mind. A match in a powder house—Fenton caught his breath staring at the kegs of powder.

"Why not?" he asked himself in an audible whisper. Why not? What was it Metesa had said—"Let good men sell guns to good men—make good as strong as evil—" Unanswerable logic! Or so it had seemed at the time. But there was another way. Destroy Kabba Effendi's guns and shrewd old Metesa would be on equal terms with him! Better than that, the Bairu serfs wouldn't fight for Kabba Effendi; they wouldn't fight for anyone. Kabba would have nothing but his body-guard of Arabs. And the body-guard would having nothing left but the few rounds their master's suspicious fear doled out of them. Fenton grinned happily. He went to the door.

"Yoso," said he, "We will have to leave here quickly." He pointed down the passage. "I think there is a guard outside—"

"Give me your white robe, Ngatha," said Yoso coolly. "He will be dead before he knows his mistake."

Back in the armory Fenton rolled out a couple of kegs and stove in their heads with the butt of the Colt. Swiftly he made a train of powder from the magazine down the long passage. As he came to the door Yoso entered, wiping the blade of his knife.

"Outside!" ordered Fenton, striking a match.

"Aie!" Yoso's eyes bulged. "Now I see what is in your mind!"

The powder flared; a sheet of flame raced up the passage, firing the cedar floor as it went. It went a good deal faster than Fenton had anticipated. He wrenched open the door and dashed out.

"Run, Yoso!" he yelled "Stop for nothing!"

Together they raced across the courtyard, heading for the shelter of the trees. A challenge rang out, followed by a shot. They gained the shadow of a cluster of palms. Then the magazine blew up. The

force of the blast caught them in mid-stride. Fenton turned a somersault in the air and landed on his back a good twenty feet from the trees. When he got his breath back, he saw Yoso staggering towards him.

"Ngatha," gasped the young warrior as he flung himself on the ground beside Fenton, "When next you do a thing like that, make a longer train!"

A pall of black, acid-smelling smoke hung over the hill. Burning fragments of wood fell through it, showering the roofs of the huts and the Kazinga with fire. Soon the hill-top was an infernal pandemonium of shrieking blacks, Arabs and roaring flames. Kabba's women, driven from the seclusion of the harem, passed within a few feet of Fenton and Yoso, weeping and wailing. All were racing for the steep trail that led down to the town.

"We have made a torch to show Metesa the way," observed Fenton. "Kazinga is his for the taking."

THERE was no answer. Startled, he looked around him. Then he saw Kabba Effendi. Two armed Arab guards were helping the fat Egyptian along the broad path. Yoso had seen him, too. As Fenton watched, the young warrior sprang from behind a clump of bush. One guard went down under a flashing knife. The other fired point blank. Yoso staggered but did not fall.

The Arab dropped his gun and ran. Kabba squealed and started to run, his huge belly bouncing in front of him like a ball.

Yoso bounded after him. Fenton saw his knife flash and flash again. Kabba collapsed like a balloon with the air suddenly let out of it. For a moment Yoso stood looking down at his fallen enemy, then slowly he sank to his knees.

So swiftly had the grim scene been enacted that it was over before Fenton had got to his feet and covered the distance between himself and the trio.

Yoso was hurt but not dangerously. The ball from the Arab's Snider had torn a chunk of flesh from his side. Quickly and expertly Fenton worked to stem the flow of blood.

"If you stay with me you will burn," said Yoso faintly.

"Fire follows the wind, Yoso, and Metesa will soon be here," Fenton encouraged him. "We will work our way to the windward of the fire. Come, with my help you can walk."

At dawn Metesa pitched his tent in the market place of the Kazinga. But his wild bowmen and spearmen were not happy. Their enemies had scattered before their rapid advance and their spears were innocent of blood.

To be sure there were fat herds and women to assuage their disappointment, still for Metesa's fierce hillmen, trained for the hour of battle such things were the spice, not the food. They longed to wield their spears, to test their might against all the strength of the jungle.

But disillusionment was not the mood of their astute old chieftain. He sat within his tent and beamed on Fenton.

"I asked you for guns," said he, "But you gave me Kazinga and the life of my son whom you carried to safety through the fire. I swear this to you, Ngatha. Whenever men of your race come to me I will treat them well.

"Even when they come to cheat me—as they surely will—I will not slay them. No, I will not kill them lest there be one among them who is like my friend, Ngatha. I promised you ivory—"

Fenton held up his hand. "We will talk of that later, Metesa. There was a woman who came to you—"

Metesa snorted in disgust. "It is always the same with the young—women!"

He rose. "I will send her to you. My tent is yours, Ngatha. But you are foolish to show eagerness. With women that is never wise—never, anytime, anyplace."

When the girl came in there was silence between them for a long while. Fenton was beyond speech.

She wore no veil and her dark brown hair was done up in a knot at the top of her head.

"It was the veil and trinkets that fooled me," said he at last.

"When I saw you last you were just a strip of a girl, all arms and legs, Manova Van Dirk."

She made a slight gesture.

"That does not excuse you," said she with mockery in her eyes, "Since you were so eager to get rid of the grown woman."

Fenton grinned. "I've changed my mind

about that. But how did you get to Kazinga?"

"When Ahmed came to my father's factory at Ishango to sell Metesa's ivory, I thought it would be safe to show myself, dressed as an Arab girl.

It was against poor father's will and he was right. Ahmed saw me. My father could do nothing against him and his armed men. They laughed at his threats and took me away. At first when you offered to buy me, I thought you knew me. Later, I thought—" She broke off, flushing red.

"Later, what?" Fenton asked, with a slow, amused smile forming on his lips.

Manova's blush grew brighter. She covered her eyes. She fidgetted. Then, suddenly, she began to smile like a naughty child. She stared openly at Fenton.

Fenton rose and advanced upon her: "*Later,* you thought it would be amusing to make a fool of me," Fenton finished for her. "Well, you've had your fun. And now——"

"No!" gasped the girl and turned to run. But Fenton caught her in his arms and laughed as she struggled.

"There's no hope for you at all," said he. "You sold yourself for twenty-five—no, it was ten pounds. A bargain for any man, I'd say!

But out of the goodness of my heart, I'll grant my little slave-girl one concession. I'll make the bargain legal first, at the first mission station we come to."

Her struggles ceased.

Her soft, tremulous laughter sounded muffled against his breast, and he felt her fingers tighten against his arm.

"If it so pleases my lord," she murmured finally with a little shiver of delight. And, lifting her head, she kissed him.

For the best in thrilling adventure and fast-action stories read FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES

look for the oulls-eye

"CAUSE for ALARM"

"The gradual breakdown of the American home is beginning to be reflected in the national behavior pattern and is a real cause for alarm." This was the comment of J. Edgar Hoover, FBI chief, in announcing that crime increased 7.6 per cent in 1946 to a ten-year high.

More persons aged 21 were arrested than any other age group. A total of 108,787 persons under 21 were arrested in 1946. They represented 16.9 per cent of the total arrested.

Mr. Hoover commented that juvenile delinquents of the war years are graduating from petty thieves into armed robbers and other serious criminals. Red Feather youth services of your Community Chest are fighting against delinquency by providing opportunities for youth to learn and play under wholesome auspices.

Only more-than-average financial support to Community Chest campaigns this fall will help to combat these worse-than-average records.

Remember, everybody benefits when delinquency and crime are held down by the activities of Red Feather services. That's why everybody should give to your Community Chest campaign.

Impelled by some dim instinct, Collins prostrated himself before the altar.

B'wana Panther-Claw

By JULIAN LASH

What deadly juju could make Phil Collins give back the Golden Fetish of Subhuka?

PHIL COLLINS had trouble keeping up with his partner, Martel. They were plodding along a hot humid trail, still soggy from one of those sudden, furious West African showers that had drenched the jungle earlier that afternoon. Tongo, their tall black Masai bearer, shambled along silently behind.

Both whites were tanned to a snuff-color brown from years of the Ivory Coast sun, but there the resemblance ended. Kurt Martel was a huge man, crowding six-foot four and wide in proportion. Though his rugged, homely face wore a look of good-natured self-satisfaction, his eyes were hard and calculating. He walked as if he owned the trail, the jungle, and the whole African continent.

Collins, skittering through the muck at Martel's side, was scrawny and unhealthy-looking. He wore his cork helmet at a jaunty angle that implied brashness and confidence, but he kept glancing nervously up and down the narrow, jasmine-choked pathway. Collins was a man of two moods: cocksure and worried. Right now he was

worried. He should never have let Martel drag him out here on this wild goose chase, he was thinking. Three weeks' journey out of their way. And into the wildest part of the Liberian hinterland, where even the negro administrators from Monrovia never penetrated without heavy escort . . .

"Kurt—" he started to say.

Just then a hunting party of Beti tribesmen, dressed in leather breech-clouts and panther-tooth necklaces and each carrying the ugly, spade-bladed Beti spear, stepped out of a side-path directly ahead. Startled, Collins lapsed into silence. The wild-haired little bushmen passed them as if they had been part of the scenery, ignoring them completely.

These were some of the fiercest blacks in West Africa, Collins knew. Here in territory untouched by the white man they still carried on the ancient panther-worship, with its cannibalism and ritual murders. Even the French territory across the Cavally River was not safe from them. Often they stole across the river by night, made their human kills, and returned before dawn to their forest stronghold — *here.* Collins shivered slightly and watched them until they had disappeared down the trail.

"Kurt," he began again, "I don't like the smell of this."

The big man looked at him. "You yellow jackal," he said with a hard smile.

"Listen," Collins muttered. "There's plenty we haven't figured in this deal. How about those kill-crazy bushmen? and the witch doctor, the *Subhaka.* How do we know what *he's* got up his sleeve?"

"I don't care, long as it isn't a Webley pistol." Martel patted his revolver in its holster.

"Kurt, you got to admit there are *risks!*"

"Forget about the risks. Think of the rewards, Phil, old man," Kurt clapped a heavy hand on his partner's shoulder. "We can clear out of this stinking jungle for good. Three months from now, when we're sitting in some Cairo cafe, drinking vermouth cassis with a couple of demoiselles, you'll thank me for this."

"When," said Collins weakly.

He kicked at a straggling liana in the trail. It was impossible to argue with Kurt. The man was a hothead. And Phil was a fool to string along with him. They'd had a steady, profitable thing of it in their regular Sassandra River territory, trading for ivory and hides—with a little hi-jack traffic in arms and rum thrown in.

Now they had thrown all that away. Because of that fool Dioula peddler, Ali Hassim. They'd got Hassim tanked up on cheap trade rum. But instead of the trading information they'd hoped for, the black Mohammedan had babbled of a certain golden fetish to be found in Beti country —guarded only by a *juju* and his apprentice. Some day, Ali had bragged, he would go back with his four brothers, fearless men all, and wrest this valuable treasure from the infidel bushmen. Only Kurt decided to beat him to it . . .

Damn Kurt for a half-cocked fool!

He turned back towards Tongo, who was lagging behind. "Snap it up, you lazy beggar, or I'll beat your head in!" he rasped, venting his anger on the nearest available target.

The black increased the speed of his bored shuffle by an imperceptible fraction.

The trail seemed to be getting darker, the vegetation more dense. Up ahead, there was a sharp turn. A brilliantly-colored toucan, which had been worrying at a discarded banana on the ground, flew away with a startled squawk at their approach. A troupe of chattering monkeys crashed by through the high branches overhead.

"This is it," said Kurt as they rounded the turn. He loosened his revolver in its holster.

Collins fingered nervously at the shoulder strap of his carbine. In the bend of the trail was a niche carved out of the solid wall tangled jacaranda trees. It contained the crudely carved wooden image of a panther. At the image's feet were dozens of votive offerings, ranging from massive costly bracelets to simple garlands of twisted leaves. Beside the niche was a narrow pathway, closed to the main trail by a curtain of dried leaves.

A Beti woman, naked except for her heavy brass necklace and anklets, was holding up a bowl of millet to the image. She lifted her tattooed face and stared with open curiosity at the white men. Then she stood up and strode rapidly away, looking back over her shoulder from time to time as she retreated down the trail.

They stood facing the curtained path. This was a *barred trail* similar to hundreds

of others Collins had seen throughout the jungle. The curtain of leaves signified that some native mystery lay within. And in this land the frail barrier was just as effective as a bolted iron door. No native would dare to pass it. Silly superstition, Collins thought impatiently. He looked up and down the trail—there was no one in sight. The Beti woman had gone.

"Let's go in," Collins said quickly. As long as it had to be done, he wanted to get it over with as soon as possible. He pushed the curtain aside with a brusque gesture. "You first, Tongo."

The black recoiled. All of a sudden there was a shocked horror on his face. "No—no! Tongo will not go in there, Bwana! Bad *juju!*"

Kurt cuffed the Masai across the head with a swipe of his arm that almost knocked him down. "You do as you're told!"

Tongo backed down the trail, his face contorted by fear. He seemed almost about to run away. "No! Tongo is afraid of the Subhaka! He have powerful magic! He steal men's souls by the look of his eyes! Tongo is afraid!"

Martel looked at his partner. "He's no damned good now. Leave him out." He turned to the black. "All right, you don't have to go in. Wait here for us to come back."

"Tongo will wait for you, Bwana. But perhaps you will not come out again."

Kurt gave a short explosive laugh at this and stepped in. Collins followed.

Collins felt cockier now that they had passed the barrier. He unslung his carbine and held it in front of him with both hands. "Did you see how Tongo acted? He'd rather have his arm cut off than walk in here."

"Sure," Martel assented. "All those blacks are the same. The witch doctors have got them buffaloed."

The path was dark and narrow. There was barely room for them to walk single file. Collins strained to see in the blackness. He could vaguely make out a black mass of rock about a hundred yards ahead. The eerie finger-like leaves of bombax trees hung around them.

"Don't talk," said Kurt in a low voice. "We want to get the drop on them."

They moved on cautiously. As they approached Collins could see an opening in the rock. It was a cave of some sort. He eased back the safety on his carbine.

Suddenly a figure stepped out from behind a kola tree and stood silently blocking the path. It was a young Beti, with a peculiar crescent-shaped paint-mark of an apprentice juju on his forehead. His right hand held a dagger.

Kurt covered him with his revolver. "Walk back toward the cave," he commanded, in clumsy Bambara.

The man shook his head. "He's supposed to be under a vow of silence," murmured Collins, keeping a tense grip on his rifle.

"Well, he can hear me, even if he won't talk," Kurt growled. His gun clicked threateningly as he cocked it. "*Shubba!* Walk back to the cave or I'll kill you!" His voice was low, grating.

The native's eyes widened in alarm. His legs trembled and he half looked back toward the cave as if wishing for instructions. Then suddenly he launched himself straight at Martel.

Collins braced himself for the report of Kurt's Webley, but it never came. With a swiftness amazing for one of his bulk, Kurt dodged under the knife-thrust and sent his huge fist crashing into the young Beti's jaw. The impact of the blow sent the black flying. He reeled to the ground, dazed, and tried to get back on his feet. But instantly, the big man was standing over him, gun-butt raised. He brought the butt down in a vicious swing. The native's skull crushed sickeningly.

Kurt looked back. "Couldn't risk shooting," he said. "I didn't want to give warning to the other bird back there."

Collins nodded. Gingerly, he stepped over the corpse to rejoin his partner. He wished he could be less squeamish about killing. Kurt always said it meant less to him to kill a man than to step on a bug in the road—and killing the man usually got you more for your trouble, he said. That was the way to be, smart, practical. Just the same, if there was any killing to be done—and there had been on occasion during their years in the bush—he usually left it to Kurt.

As they neared the cave, Kurt took a flashlight from his belt. They stepped inside. They were in a tunnel, a smooth rock corridor leading downward from the en-

trance. They moved forward, their boots making scraping noises against the rock floor. There was light ahead; as they neared it, Kurt switched off the flash. Collins heard the big man gasp as he stepped forward. "Take a look at this, Phil," Martel said in an awestruck voice. Collins moved to his side and looked.

They were in a torch-lit rock chamber, high-walled and angular. Panther-skin capes and headpieces, together with sets of ritual iron panther-claws, hung on racks around the walls. The Subhaka was not there, but directly ahead of them, on a rock altar festooned with cowrie shells, stood the fetish. It was some sort of panther-devil, intricately wrought, with the body of a man and the head and claws of a leopard. It was poised in a half-crouch, mouth twisted in a snarl, its claw-like hands upraised as if to strike. And in the flickering torch light it glowed with the soft radiance of pure dull gold. More gold than Collins had ever seen before in his life.

"Good lord, Kurt!" he breathed. He looked at it with reverance—reverence for the millions of franc notes, pounds, and dollars it represented.

"Hah!" Kurt pushed back his helmet and stood surveying the idol with a broad proprietary grin. "We're rich, Phil!" He gave Collins a slap on the back. "Here, let me see how heavy it is." The big man reached out to grasp the fetish.

"It's heavy as hell. I can barely lift it." Grunting, Martel heaved it up and stood holding it in his arms. "This thing must weigh a good two hundred pounds!"

He put it back on the altar. "Listen, go out and see if the coast is clear. We'd better pull out of here fast."

Collins went up the tunnel to the mouth of the cave and peered down the gloomy trail. There was no one in sight, except the dead apprentice, still lying across the path. He listened a moment for footsteps in the underbrush. There were none. He turned back to call Kurt. Just then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw the Subhaka standing in the cave's entrance.

He whirled, his rifle covering the man. "Don't move!" he grated tensely.

The Subhaka was silent. He was a tall man, taller by a head than most Betis. His body was covered with ochre paint-marks in an intricate, undulating pattern that made Collins dizzy. His eyes were sombre and intense, and he was staring at Collins with an expression of stark malevolence. For a moment Collins had the uncomfortable feeling he was looking into the eyes of a wild animal.

Finally the magician spoke. "You have defied Taudhana Kula, the Great Fetish," he said. "You will die, white man!"

"Do not try any tricks," said Collins in Bambara, holding the carbine centered on the man. "I'll kill you."

Still the magician stared at Collins. His eyes seemed to pierce and burn. Collins could not look away. He could only think vaguely, *"If Kurt were here . . ."*

"Taudhana Kula stirs in anger," said the Subhaka. His voice was soft and ominous. "His just revenge gathers like lightning to strike you down. He will crush your body and carry your shrieking soul down to Morackis, the place-of-torment. You will be powerless to resist him. Soon he will come for you . . ."

Collins stared as if hynotized at the Subhaka's glittering eyes. Suddenly the threats seemed to be growing real. Suddenly he felt danger there in the forest gloom, unknown horrors gathering like a smoke to choke and stifle him . . .

His hands tightened convulsively on the carbine. Still he did not take his eyes off the Subhaka.

"Look at what you are holding!" the Subhaka commanded.

Collins looked down at the rifle. Numbly, he noticed that the barrel of the gun was gone. Instead, a deadly puff adder was coiled around the wooden stock, its head weaving back and forth, its tongue lashing out in anger. With a shocked gasp, he threw the weapon to the ground.

"You are powerless against the Great Fetish," murmured the Subhaka. "Taudhana Kula possesses your soul. When He is ready for His revenge He will send for you."

The juju Beti approached and stood over Collins, staring into his eyes. "You will do His bidding," he said softly.

"I will do His bidding," Collins repeated. It was as if something else within him had made him answer. He stood transfixed, looking up at the Subhaka.

Suddenly there was an ear-splitting shot from within the cave. The Subhaka was

thrown back sprawling to the ground. He jerked once and then was still.

As if waking from a dream, Collins looked up and saw Kurt advancing, the smoking Webley in his hand.

"What the devil was the matter with you?" the big man demanded angrily. "The way you were staring at that black, you'd think he had you hypnotized . . . And how did he get your gun away from you?"

"I—I don't know, Kurt." The memory of the past few minutes seemed to have faded entirely from Collins's mind. "Some trick, I guess."

"Well, you're lucky I was around, that's all I can say. Come on, help me carry out this damned idol."

Kurt poked the dying campfire. "Tongo, you black swine, bring wood for the fire!" he called into the darkness.

"Ei! Bwana!" answered a sleepy voice. There was an audible yawn and then their Masai bearer approached the fire with an armload of faggots which he began laying one by one on the smoldering embers.

"You let that fire go out tonight and I'll tan your wretched hide," remarked Kurt pleasantly. "Hear me?"

"I hear, Bwana. But Tongo would rather sleep and be beaten afterward than stay awake all night and in the morning be beaten anyway."

"You're a comedian," Kurt chuckled and turned to his partner. "Hear that? The loafer knows I'm in a good mood so he talks back to me. Any other time I'd pin his ears back for him."

"Yeah." Collins said it mechanically. He was dead-tired, half-asleep, and was paying no attention. All night they had been talking over the gold, gloating over it, deciding how they would spend it. Algiers would be better than Cairo, they had finally decided. They'd get a *villa* with a private beach and a well-stocked wine cellar. And a custom-built Delage and a black chauffeur to drive it. And . . . but Collins was tired of all that now. All he wanted was sleep.

Off in the distance a high-pitched voodoo drum droned faintly on and on in a monotonous rhythm. When it had first started, half an hour ago, Kurt had claimed he didn't hear it. The man must be getting deaf, Collins thought.

Suddenly the drum stopped. A panther roared in the brush nearby. There was a sound of animals crashing by in the darkness beyond. The panther roared again and its mate answered it from further off. Drums, panthers, Taudhana Kula and the Subhaka's half-remembered threats — all this blended in Collins's mind and seemed vaguely menacing. But he was too tired to think about it. He looked at Martel, who was staring into the fire.

"Even at two thousand francs the ounce, that'll make, let me see—" Kurt was muttering, "—sixteen times two thousand is thirty-two thousand, times two hundred, at least two hundred—that makes—" This was the tenth time tonight he had been through the calculation.

Collins stood up. "I'm turning in."

Oh, all right," said the big man without looking up. "Remember we get an early start in the morning."

"Yeah. Goodnight."

Collins went to his tent, pulled off his boots, and threw himself on the camp-cot. In a corner of the tent stood the Fetish, enigmatic, glinting in the darkness. Collins looked at it for a moment, then turned over and fell asleep at once.

But Collins was a light sleeper and after a while—perhaps minutes, perhaps an hour or more, he could not tell—he suddenly awoke, feeling the presence of someone there in the tent with him. He sat up suddenly.

"Who's there?" he asked.

The words froze in his throat. He was staring into the glittering, glowing eyes of the Subhaka. Silently the austere juju gazed at him. Then he raised an arm in a beckoning gesture.

"Come," he ordered. "Taudhana Kula calls you to do His bidding. You must return to his shrine. I, His servant, command you!"

His eyes fixed to the Subhaka's stare, Collins sat working his lips noiselessly. He wanted to get help, to call Kurt, to be freed of this specter. A whimper of fear broke from him. He could do nothing. His will was caught and held. He was helpless.

"Come," the Subhaka repeated. Then all Collins's resistance snapped. Meekly, he got up from the bed. In obedience to the Subhaka's gesture, he stooped to grasp the golden idol, lifting it effortlessly to his shoulder as if it were a thing of no weight. Like an automaton, he followed the Sub-

haka out of the tent, into the shadows of the jungle night. He was no longer Collins. He no longer thought, saw, or felt, except dimly, deep within him. Like a puppet drawn by invisible strings, he followed in the wake of the Subhaka.

Without looking back, the magician moved down a trail thickly overgrown with vines and hanging branches. They were taking the road back to the cave of the Fetish. The Subhaka walked without hurrying. Collins followed like a shadow.

When they entered the dark *barred trail* a sigh of reminiscence escaped him. Dimly, as if from a past existence, he remembered being here. Down the trail they went. As they neared the cave, Collins had to step over the dead body of a man, though the Subhaka seemed to walk straight through it. At the cave's mouth, another body was sprawled on the ground.

They entered the cave, walked to the rock chamber. Collins placed the idol back on the altar and then, impelled by some dim instinct within him, prostrated himself before the altar, forehead touching the stone floor. The Subhaka advanced to his side.

"O Great Fetish, here is one who has offended You," he intoned. "You have commanded that he be brought before You, O Lord-of-Life-and-Death. You have commanded that he be purged of his crimes against You. So shall it be."

Abruptly, a drum began to beat, the same drum that Collins had heard back in camp. Without looking up Collins could sense the Subhaka's apprentice sitting crosslegged in the shadow of the idol, beating out the ghostly rhythms that filled the cave. The Subhaka made ritual gestures over him, repeated a litany in some ancient tongue. Then he prodded the kneeling man.

Collins raised himself from the ground. Without being told, he seemed to know what was expected of him. He moved to the other end of the chamber. The Subhaka motioned to a panther skin cape hanging from a rack. Collins placed it over himself. Subhaka indicated a panther headpiece. Collins put it on. Then he took a set of the iron claws and fastened them to his fingers. He stood dully still.

"Now the panther-spirit of Taudhana Kula possesses you," said the Subhaka. "Go now and do His bidding!" He grasped Collins's shoulders and thrust him gently toward the door of the chamber.

Instantly Collins snapped to life. A bursting flood of energy swept through him. He passed through the door, moved swiftly up the tunnel, broke into a smooth, silent trot as he burst out into the trail. Every muscle in his body worked with perfect co-ordination. He felt an exultant sense of power.

But the mind that was guiding him was not the mind of Collins. It was something bestial, primitive. His sense was keenly alive. His eyes pierced the darkness, penetrating the blackest shadows along the trail.

A thousand meaningful scents assailed his nostrils. And in his soul raged a cold, malignant lust—the lust of the panther for his prey.

He padded noiselessly up the trail. Suddenly, he caught the scent of his enemy. A maddening scent that grew ever heavier as he hastened forward. He was getting closer. He swerved from the trail, into the protective cover of the brush. The scent grew overpoweringly strong. He slackened his pace to a cautious lope as he approached it.

The noxious odor of wood smoke blended in with the man-smell, and he quivered in distaste.

And as he came to the clearing he saw the man-thing. It was sitting by a blazing fire. He blinked his eyes uncomfortably against the flames.

The man-thing was not alone. Another of its kind, but darker, was with it. Crouching patiently, he waited . . .

His prey seemed angry. It made threatening noises at the black man-thing, then stood up and struck it. The black one fell to the ground, making very loud noises, and his prey kicked it.

The black one crawled away. He watched it without interest. The big white man-thing stood looking down at the fire. Then it yawned. It turned away and walked into its lair.

This was his moment. Moving out from cover, he advanced toward the lair, giving a wide berth to the odious fire. Up to the lair he crept, listening to the noises it made inside, smelling its maddening scent. Suddenly the kill-lust exploded inside him and he sprang . . .

Startled, the man-thing tried to grapple with him. With a snarling rake of his claws he slashed it to the bone. As he closed in for the kill, the eyes of his prey met his and it made a loud, agonized noise. "PHIL!!!" it cried. But it shuddered into silence as he clawed it again and again and finally sank his teeth into its flabby white throat, and blood gushed out over his chin . . .

Tongo awoke to the cawing of a parrot in a tree across the clearing. He sat up sleepily, rubbing his eyes in the light of the morning sun. Then he remembered. Last night there had been a great noise of screaming and growling in Bwana Martel's tent.

Then by the fire he had seen a panther emerge. He had shot at it with his battered old Springfield.

He was sure he had hit it, but had not dared approach it in the dark for fear it was merely wounded. Strange, he had thought, that he had heard no panther-like growls or whining, familiar accompaniments of the last hours of a fatally wounded jungle beast.

The panther was not in the clearing, but there was a blood-spoor leading away from Bwana Martel's tent. Before following it, he looked into the tent and peered around with a puzzled frown.

"Ei, the Bwana is truly dead!" he said to himself, not unhappily, as he stared curiously at the brutal claw-marks on the big man's body.

Tongo also noticed the strange, horrible tooth marks in the throat of his former master. He had been killed in the cruelest way possible, almost too cruel even for a panther Tongo thought.

Then he followed the spoor. There had been great bleeding. The jungle cat was surely lying dead nearby. Sure enough, at the edge of the clearing he saw a patch of panther skin sticking out from under a bush.

Approaching, however, he saw it was not a panther. There was something oddly familiar about the crumpled figures.

He turned the man over and looked with surprise into the glassy eyes of Bwana Collins, staring out from under the panther head-piece.

Man-Eating Devils

By LAWTON FORD

No voodoo on earth could stop those death-fanged devils as they swarmed toward the Bowl-Of-Heaven. But Spenser Frost lay there waiting for them . . . waiting to be eaten alive!

THERE IS NOTHING TO DO but wait. One end of our prison is unknown darkness, the other a sickening black pit over which we cannot pass. It might be that I can never tell the world what has happened in the past few hours, except by this manuscript. If what I have been told is true, there may be nothing to give a clue to the disappearance of Spenser Frost and his guide M'kowa. When I have completed this manuscript I will leave it beneath me so that it may reach the world outside. We were told *"they"* do not eat anything but meat. This manuscript should remain after we have gone.

That night when I first heard of the leaf-colored devils M'kowa was telling me the African name and place prefixes. We squatted before my tent in the Rusis River valley.

"It is easy, Bwana. It is easier than English." M'kowa spoke slowly. "I was fifteen years in Djibouti before I could speak a dozen words in English."

"You're quite capable now," I assured him.

I saw tiny faces with long sharp fangs, claw-like feet and hands. They mounted M'kowa's body as he stood at the edge of the precipice. They were going to eat him alive!

"That is because I spent the last five years working for the army," said M'kowa. "I worked for a lot of Americans and picked up many news words."

M'kowa was an enormous figure in his dull, charcoal black skin and fuzzy hair. He sported a bangle of shells below one knee, sun-faded khaki shorts, a necklace of small chicken bones, and wore his fuzzy hair well oiled. There was one tuft of it plaited around a sharpened bone. He walked with long straight legs in a supple, swinging stride. His torso was remarkable for its proportions. His arms were long and muscular. Under his dull black skin the sinews rippled and flexed in effortless perfection of motion.

My guide not only looked a physically perfect specimen, he was extremely well co-ordinated and phenomenally strong. On

one occasion we were surprised by a lioness in the dense tangle of the bush over near Lake Victoria. M'kowa was some distance from me and I had a lot of trouble getting through the matted vines and long grass which separated us. The lioness treed M'kowa, who was unarmed, and then climbed after him. M'kowa swung out on a loop of vine between trees and hung there fully thirty feet off the ground. The lioness snarled at him from a limb of one tree, then sprang at him futilely from the ground, and then climbed another tree to get at him. M'kowa hung from the vine, grinning, for perhaps twenty minutes until I hacked my way to a point where I could get a shot at the cat. The really phenomenal part of that performance is that M'kowa hung by one hand, since he was carrying my fragile and precious camera and tripod.

M'kowa was a liberated Uganda boy (liberated from the mental bonds of native savagery, superstition and fatalism by some years in the coastal regions), and he had traveled this hidden valley below the Mountains of the Moon enough to call himself a guide. At least guide enough for me, since my geographic studies required only that my guide in this instance know the way into the equatorial mountain country and the way out. He was different in many ways from the general run of natives on the Nile-Congo watershed, who are a queer lot, childish, unpredictable and contemptuous of injury or death.

If I needed any further proof of their alien ways, I was to have it that night. As M'kowa and I chatted and cleaned our guns in the flickering light of the little fire, while jungle sounds of the day grew lower and fainter, a perfect specimen of the Upper Congo savage approached us and stood waiting for my acknowledgment. Ordinarily these men, tall, lithe and gleaming brutes, when they have business with a white man, will call from afar that they wish to make talk.

The man waited for my invitation to come closer.

"Enter my tent," I called to him. "My house is your house."

Seeing that I meant my invitation literally, the savage approached and entered, stooping a little. We saw a young man with greasy hair, huge-boned, proud and erect.

I started to prompt the native to speak his piece, but a warning glance from M'kowa, who knew these people fairly well, stopped me. M'kowa was my social mentor as well as guide.

At length the visitor said, in deep gutterals, "I am M'lune, My tribe Wamuntee." He looked away from me and yawned. Then, covering his huge mouth with his hand he giggled, began to scratch his back on the center-pole, stretched and yawned again. Gradually he slipped down the pole to squat on the ground, laughing loudly with exaggerated casualness and a display of unconcern. M'kowa's straight face told me this was a preamble, the customary manner of leading up to a talk. M'lune drummed on the hard earth with his long black fingers, yawned and stretched and looked at me inquisitively.

"What is your word, M'lune?' I asked. To make him feel more at ease, I squatted, facing him. I looked at the ground in front of me.

M'LUNE spoke then in a rumbling deep voice, like a twanging bull-fiddle with loosened strings. Since I knew only the nouns and a few verbs and was ignorant of whatever grammar the Kimuntee boasted, M'kowa filled in details where I missed the point of a phrase.

"The White Master," said M'lune, "is wise to leave the hill country. There is talk of the man-plague."

I looked at M'kowa to see if he made sense to this. M'kowa drawled a question, not looking at the visitor. "Does M'lune speak of fever and demons within the body . . . a plague that burns the bones?"

"No. M'lune speaks of the man-plague, the plague of devils which climb the mountain to dance in the bowl of heaven. The leaf-colored devils of my father's time, of my brother's time. If the talk-talk is true, the devils will be of my time, too." M'lune patted his hair with a show of unconcern.

M'kowa breathed another question softly, meanwhile scratching the sole of his foot with the pointed bone from his hair. "Devils of solid flesh, my heart's brother? Leaf-colored on their skins? I have not heard of such."

"Few men have heard," answered M'lune, looking at the canvas over his head. "But many years ago I saw them.

Now come more warnings. We call those of the man-plague devils, for they take the shape of men." M'lune held a hard flat palm down on a level about four inches from the floor. "Devils of leaf colored skins, with bodies of men this size."

I could not help but look in amazement at M'lune's face; M'kowa's head also jerked up. "This interests me very much," I said. "Will M'lune tell me more?"

"When the man-plague climbs to the bowl of heaven, it is as though a family of hyenas had walked through the village. No piece of meat is left." M'lune put his thumb against the tip of his little finger, to indicate the minuteness of the little pieces of meat which would not be left.

I wanted to get to the bottom of that expression "bowl of heaven." "The bowl of heaven is the mountain top?"

M'lune swept a straight arm up in a circle, from shoulder to shoulder over his head. "The bowl of heaven is the cover of the earth," he stated. "In it, the moon and stars roll from side to side when the sun has gone."

"But . . . the sky . . . how do these devils reach the sky? They go up the mountain?"

"Master, they do," said M'lune.

No good pursuing that idea, I concluded. Possibly there was a simple explanation for it. I wanted to know more about the devils.

With his hand again flat four inches from the ground, M'lune described them. "Their skin is fur, of the color of a leaf. They are man-shaped; legs, arms, a head, eyes that shine, noses . . ." . . . he looked at me grinning. "You have all these, White Master. I, too. They are made like men."

A sudden thought struck me. "Tails?" I asked. "Do they have tails"?

"Of course," answered M'lune. "All devils have tails. These of the man-plague have tails . . ." he spread his thumb and forefinger six inches apart . . . "thin tails that curl."

M'lune began to stretch and yawn and laugh again, signs of approaching the end of the interview.

M'kowa asked another question. "This man-plague . . . how many devils?"

M'lune raised his eyebrows and opened his mouth. "Like the leaves whose color they wear; they are as many as those leaves. When I saw the devils from afar, I saw a valley of devils, a day's march across, a day's march from the first to the last."

"Millions! So many?" I asked.

"More, White Master. When the devils climbed up the side of the valley to cross the mountain, the valley became deeper, deeper, deeper. I knew I had seen the surface of a pool of devils. When they had gone, the valley was empty, and deeper by the height of the highest tree in this land."

"But that's impossible!" I burst out. "They'd crush the under ones! A pool of monkeys . . . devils . . . sixty to seventy feet deep would weigh tons. The bottom ones would be crushed."

M'lune shrugged. "Master, they left the valley. They were not crushed." He patted his oily hair fondly.

It seemed futile to pursue the point. I felt I should have more specific information about the danger of the devils.

"How is it that M'lune knows of the coming of the devils?" I inquired. "I have heard no drums for days past."

"Master, I know not," said M'lune. "I am not a witch-man. But the village elders tell me, and tell me to talk-talk you of the coming of the man-plague. There is yet time for the white man to go down the hills and march to the south."

"That sounds ridiculous!" I protested. "I can take care of myself. A pack of midget monkeys won't scare me." I slapped my rifle suggestively.

"The White Master's thunder will be as the cry of a bird in the forest," said M'lune.

M'KOWA was much more concerned than I. He asked many more questions of the savage who had come to warn us of the mysterious danger. Boiled down, it came to the fact that there was to be a great migration of miniature anthropoids from a point about due west, through the broad valley of the Nyanza, south of the lake, traveling to the Tanganyika Lake. Then they would bear north toward the Equator, up the slope of the Nile-Congo watershed to the Margherita, the highest peak of Mount Stanley. There the information halted in the belief that the little beasts climbed on each other's shoulders

until they reached the sky, when they pulled one another up after them and disappeared. The inclination to anthropomorphize these beasts was a natural one in these childish savages. But the stories of their millions, and the idea of a pool of devils was fantastic. Yet M'kowa was greatly concerned. He wanted to know if M'lune knew when the man-plague was coming.

"They come with the sun," replied M'lune. "It is said they will climb the mountain at dawn on the day which follows this day."

Tomorrow at dawn! Where did this savage ever get the idea we could trek south and get away before the plague arrived? M'kowa saw my angry look.

"Hold, Bwana," he said softly, not looking directly at me. "Some of these fellows don't know any farther than one day ahead. All we can get out of what he says is that they'll come on a day which follows today . . . any day following. Maybe tomorrow, maybe next week. If he thinks we have time to get away maybe it's a couple of days off at least."

To M'lune, my guide said, "You speak of a day which is to follow. Will that day come before we make a one day march?"

M'lune shook his head, silent.

"Will two marches come before the man-plague?"

M'lune nodded sharply, hesitated a moment, scratched his belly, then nodded again with finality.

"At least two days, Bwana, I think," said M'kowa.

M'lune was tired of us .He yawned, giggled and stretched, rising from the ground.

"The White Master receives your words with good heart," I assured him. I took a length of red cloth and draped his shoulder. He ignored the gift superbly, stretching nonchalantly, and sidled out of the tent without another word.

M'kowa and I jawed on after the messenger had left us, but without much being decided. The whole idea was fantastic, too remote to seem of peril to us.

In the morning I took my guide down the slope to the compound of the chief of the Wamuntee. There we talked of everything but what was in our minds.

The Wamuntee village lies at the foot of Margherita Peak, in a depression formed by high steep guardian ranges running north and south on both sides, closing in a narrow corridor of jungle. The north end of the corridor is impassable Margherita. The south opens only to the path to Lake Tanganyika, the route M'lune advised us to take.

II

THE Wamuntee's chief's compound practically comprised the village. It held three small grass huts and a larger hut with open sides where conferences were held. There the chief gave audience to his people. This hut had a hard-packed earth floor, some reed beds, and a stone fire pit.

Bula Matari sat with us in a circle composed of elders and medicine men. M'lune was one of us, silent and unobtrusive. Bula Matari presented a ludicrous picture because of an old brown sweater he wore at confabs. It had large mother-of-pearl buttons. It sagged at elbows and in an uneven line at the bottom. The chief had various charms and insignia pinned to the sweater, an ostrich feather, a carved ivory ring, some scraggly bits of cloth. It sagged most in front where Bula Matari had secured a large thermometer. This was supposed to signify his mastery over the vagaries of nature, or his familiarity with its powers.

Bula Matari's face was smooth and unlined, woolly head slightly graying. His speech was rumbling and slow, interspersed with strange, staccato "I talk—I talk." He said this rapidly every few minutes, squeezing it in between his phrases, to remind his listeners that their chief was giving forth with pearls of wisdom.

Finally I came to the point. "I tell you thanks for the warning you sent to me last night," I said. "I am bewildered."

"The leaf-colored devils are guilty," replied Bula Matari. "They bewilder us all. I talk—I talk."

"But," I pointed out, "you advise me to trek south alone. Are you going south too? What magic do you have to protect you?"

The old man raised his eyes and looked out of the gateway of the compound. "We are a peaceful people," he said. "We have cattle and farms to work. These we cannot leave. Those of us who are able will

march over the pass to the west, where the great green river flows away. The rest will stay here. I talk—I talk."

"But if what M'lune here says is true, it will be futile. What will those who stay here do? How can you save your farms, your old ones?"

"The farms will be untouched. The devils eat only meat," Bula Matari answered gravely. "As for the old ones, I talk—I talk, we will carry with us to the west all we can. The others, with the cattle, will be put in caves and guarded by stone barricades. I have been taught how to preserve my old people and their possessions. My fathers have given me this knowledge. They prepared me for the coming of the devils, if it should occur in my lifetime. I talk—I talk. In turn I have prepared my sons . . . passed these instructions on to them, so that they will know." The elders in the circle nodded in silent agreement.

"All very well," I argued, "but why must I trek south if you and your people can go west to escape the man-plague? And when are you going to get started?"

"The White Master should go south to reach freedom from the path of the man-plague. As for us, we are able to live there in the river valley while no stranger could do so. You white men need supplies, shelter; and these you would find around the long lake southward. Where we go is only jungle, thicker, darker than here. No white man has ever lived there. I talk—I talk."

Bula Matari seemed a trifle embarrassed. "Also, Man of Books, you should know that there are some of my brothers in the green valley who do not like strangers . . . alive."

I didn't need any more explanation. M'kowa looked at me curiously. His contact with Europeans and Americans had given him a macabre sense of humor. I could have sworn he licked his lips suggestively. He might as well have said, "Cannibals, Bwana!"

According to the best information thus far there was nothing but to turn south and get out of the way of the man-plague before it entered the corridor. Or we could stay where we were and see what happened. M'kowa needed no urging either way. As far as I was concerned, no idle curiosity prompted me to see what developed, but on the other hand I was not disposed to run before a rumor of unseen danger. I could not feel myself intelligently, compelled to flee from the figment of a savage's imagination, or natural phenomenon which might very easily be explained.

I made up my mind. "We stay," I said. M'kowa's face showed no concern or alarm.

I find after going over what I have written that I have failed to explain myself sufficiently. I have been so engrossed in what has happened up to this point that I have given little thought to elementary facts.

I am Spenser Frost, an employee of the National Cartographic Corporation of New York City, engaged in preparing an appendix to the Annual Geographic Atlas which they publish.

My work is the determination of place names, tribal origins, and anthropological data pertinent to this atlas.

If this ms. should be found, please notify the above corporation officers, and also Amalie Compton, my only living relative, who is Mrs. R. Compton, of 421 Edgemere Road, Floral Park, Michigan; and the Standard Trust Co., of New York City. It is my wish that my estate be given to Mrs. Compton, mentioned above.

While I was not able to learn from my books any means of explaining away the man-plague satisfactorily, or of combatting it, I did find several references which enlightened me somewhat.

It seems to me now that Ptolemy was right in at least one of his Lunae Montae conjectures, and was also right about the cannibals being found in the regions to the east of the mountains. The man-eating *men* live to the west of the Mountains of the Moon; the man-eating *beasts* live to their east. Those simians might well be the man-plague. In Richard Kandt's *Caput Nili* (Berlin. D. Reiner, 1904) and in Lucien Levy-Bruhl's *La Mentaliate Primitive* (Paris. F. Alcan, 1922) there are several references to tribal migrations. I found no mention of miniature anthropoids (except for pygmies), but I learned something of the influence of darkness, lack of vitamins, particularly *D*, and heredity, inhibited chromotolysis, resulting in the slowing down of the action of chromosomes and mitotic division of life cells. It is just possible there may be some relation between

the growth of these simians and their natural habitat.

TO RESUME the story of the events which brought me here. As long as the natives of the village were bent on running before the threat of the man-plague, I saw no reason to keep my tent on the hillside. I told M'kowa to pack it up and to bring our belongings down to the Chief's compound. There may have been some craving for a semblance of security revealed by this action, but It did not think of that then. How an empty native compound coutld provide any security is a debatable point anyway.

Bula Matari directed the loading of carefully apportioned burdens to each able man and woman. Very little was packed; just some few articles of clothing, household trivia, objects related to utility and worship; and bags of meal and fruit.

The entire tribe was ready to move in a few hours. Some old men and women had driven the cattle and goats north along the floor of the valley, toward a stony height seen vaguely through the shimmering heat of midday. All the strongest of the men were loaded with bales and bundles of gear, some with harnesses made of vine ropes to enable them to carry more, and without ceremony a start was made across the valley toward the western slope.

Bula Matari stayed until the last of the tribe was moving away. A long line of blacks was weaving through the long yellowed grass on the western approach to the pass over the hills. Unlike a normal safari or a portering gang, the people were silent. There was no jostling, no quick laughter, no grumbling or shouted commands. In the quiet windless valley it seemed as though the Wamuntee had already departed, had been long gone, although they were still visible on the rising path leading to the tree strewn slope to the pass.

Bula Matari stood silently until only the bobbing heads of the last of the villagers was visible. Then he turned to me with questioning glance. "The White Master does not believe," he accused.

"I believe," I said, "but I also believe that there is more to this man-plague than your men can tell. You admit that you have never seen it . . . you don't know what the 'devils' really are."

"Devils can take the shape of what they will. I have seen devils in the form of snakes. Who is to say what will be the form of evil when evil hungers for the soul of a man? I talk—I talk. I follow the teachings of my fathers. It is better to leave the valley until the devils have gone than to seek wisdom by rubbing shoulders with their hunger."

"Or by satisfying it," I suggested. "Nevertheless, I am not a Wamuntee. I have my rifle. That is my magic to shatter any form the devils might take. I am not afraid."

Bula Matari drew himself up in his full dignity. "The White Master has only to concern for himself. Bula Matari is a Chief. I talk—I talk. The Wamuntee are my people. There is a duty I have been given by my fathers."

"I meant no offense," I offered quickly. "I realize your position is different. I do not suggest that Bula Matari is afraid. But we see this differently." I placed my hand on the old chief's shoulder. "Go with your people and protect them. M'kowa and I will be here when you return. Perhaps then I can tell you more of the man-plague, so that in the future your children will not be forced to leave their homes."

Bula Matari turned to go. "I hope your magic is good, White Master. With my heart I hope you will greet us on our return." It seemed that he had more to say, but he did not, walking slowly to the path across the valley.

I turned to M'kowa with a smile. "They are sure we are doomed," I said. "We'll give them a surprise when they come back." M'kowa's face was untroubled, but his answer was unexpected. "Yes, Bwana. I hope it will be so."

"You doubt me too, M'kowa?" I asked. "I thought you were free of such superstitions!"

"M'kowa believes the Bwana. But you remember M'lune said that he had seen the devils. What they are I do not know, but it is certain they can be seen. Does Bwana mean to take any steps to fight the man-plague?"

"Fight them? Fight what! M'kowa, there is no such thing. Take my word for it, there is some explanation. There'll be no millions of four inch monkeys running through this valley."

M'kowa squatted by the fire pit in the chief's hut and stirred up the embers. He made no reply to my assurances. I turned to see if the villagers were still in sight, but I could see nothing of them. The valley was still. A green, sloping vista, silent, unmarked by any moving object.

"Nonsense!" I said, more to myself than to M'kowa. Then I looked south, toward the opening into our valley, through which the man-plague was supposed to come. Irritated with myself I stamped into the hut and sat on my box of books near the fire.

"I'm hungry," I said. "Let's have a lunch, M'kowa, and forget this nonsense."

M'kowa nodded and smiled. Throughout our meal he said nothing. Perhaps, I thought, I have been expecting too much of M'kowa. After all . . ., but I grudgingly admired his nerve. He was truly a faithful servant if he stuck with me instead of going with the Wamuntee over the pass to what they felt was safety.

The heat increased in the early afternoon. I dozed in the Chief's hut, sweltering in the still air. No hint of a breeze moved in the valley. While M'kowa busied himself with putting my gear in order, cleaning and polishing, I reclined in my folding chair and nodded. I suppose a couple of hours passed before I noticed anything.

Through half-closed eyes I surveyed the yellowed grass across the valley, the green slope above, the dark tangle of trees and vines along the little stream running below. The sun was still strong, glaring brassily on the scene, giving rise to shimmering waves of heat from the open ground and steaming wisps of vapor from the matted undergrowth by the river. A peculiar aura seemed to cover the valley, a film of color hazily seen as though directly over my eyes. I thought it might be due to the position of the sun, or perhaps it was just that I had never seen the valley so still before.

I noticed a slender tree near me. The long, green, finger-like leaves were so still that they seemed to be without substance, merely painted shapes against a background of quivering rising air.

THERE was no sound in the valley. The whisper of the leaves was quieted, the sound of wings was gone. The normal life of the valley had given place to a void. The scream of birds, the rush of thundering herds, the cries of little animals, the roar of monarchs of the bush, all the accustomed pulsing life blood of the jungle had drained off to the west, leaving a still and unreal land awaiting the eaters of carrion. I found myself sitting bolt upright in my chair, hands gripped tensely by my sides, staring forth into the empty hollow . . . sweating.

M'kowa's hands were poised over a piece of gear he was cleaning. He looked at me for a moment. "Did you hear something, Bwana?" he asked.

"No," I said. "I don't think so. But the valley seems strange. Perhaps there was a sound."

M'kowa listened intently. For a long minute we sat motionless. Then M'kowa let a sigh escape his lips.

"Yes, Bwana. I hear."

"You heard something? What?" I asked.

"I don't know, Bwana." He rose and stood by my side. Again we listened but I could hear nothing. "It is a sound far away, Bwana." M'kowa's eyes moved slowly. "South, Bwana. Like a rain on broad leaves. Little sounds, Bwana."

"I can't hear a thing," I protested. "You're imagining things, M'kowa." I shuffled my feet in my heavy boots, scraping the hard-packed earthen floor of the hut. My chair creaked as I rose. M'kowa regarded me soberly.

"Let's place a few fires around the hut," I ordered. "We'll light them later, when it is dark. Some of the jungle animals may be moving back into the valley."

"Yes, Bwana." As M'kowa busied himself with this task, I looked again at the tall slender tree by the hut. Although I could detect no definite movement in it, or of it, I could swear that the whole tree trembled in infinitesimal, almost imperceptible quivering, as though the finger-like leaves shuddered in dreadful anticipation.

Then I heard, faintly, a sound. I cannot describe it. Sounds, rather, a countless number of little sounds. So tiny, that a single one of them could not have been heard if it had been an inch from my ear.

M'kowa's eyes were on mine. "I cannot believe," I began, but I failed to say what I meant. I hardly knew what I meant.

M'kowa helped me. "If we go north, Bwana, to the rocky slope of Margherita Peak, no animals returning to the valley can disturb us there." He looked swiftly around the compound. "Without many men about to warn us, to frighten away hungry animals, we are too much in the open here. It would take many fires around us to keep away hungry . . . hyenas, maybe. Or frightened elephants."

I was thoughtful for a moment. Then I shrugged and admitted what was obvious.

"No use pretending, M'kowa. The man-plague is real, at least. Whatever it is, it is real. We can hear it." M'kowa nodded in agreement.

"So let's not be foolish," I continued. "We will go north to the Margherita slope. Perhaps we will find there the caves Bula Matari mentioned."

"Yes, Bwana." M'kowa was gathering up my gear.

"We travel light," I said. "My rifle, my knapsack, nothing else." I reflected that if we survived the next day or so, we could return to the village for provisions . . . and if we didn't . . .

III

SUNDOWN was not far off. As we progressed in green, dripping pathways, over dark matted creepers, the valley narrowed and became a canyon with steep sides. Straight ahead of us a sharp peak obstructed all view of whatever lay behind it. The path twisted and rose somewhat, becoming narrower, strewn with shale and drifting sand. M'kowa led the way, walking easily, or rather moving in his habitual half-trot, as he was accustomed to travel.

Beyond a turn in the path a strange sight confronted us. The high obstructing mountain peak was dead ahead, and the path ran directly to it, then through it. A high arching tunnel went straight through the gray mountain, which was only about a hundred feet from the front to the other side. The peak was perhaps a thousand feet, but the whole was like a cardboard mountain. Light from the other side came through the tunnel. The arch was high, over forty feet, and narrow, perhaps six feet wide.

"Looks promising," I said.

"Yes, Bwana. But we are going along the same road those monkeys, or whatever they are, are said to travel. If they come into this valley, they will have to go through that tunnel to get out. We would be better off if we could go to one side. We are running in front of the pack."

"Like walking in front of a locomotive," I agreed. "But what else can we do? We can't go to one side. We can't get over the hills."

"Maybe," answered M'kowa. "There may be a way."

We found the caves but it didn't help us any. We entered the passage through the mountain and found it a level corridor, straight and smooth. The sides and floor were fairly even, but from some kind of erosion, not cut or chipped away. The high, arching ceiling was shadowed by that time so that I could not see any of it. A little over half way in, M'kowa stopped.

"Something," he said, pointing to the side wall. In the half-light we could see a patched surface that told of a barricaded offshoot of the main passage. The newly made surface was circular, a four or five foot patch. Someone had plastered the wall with mud, smoothing it over flat stones.

As though in answer to the questions in my mind, a man appeared at the far end of the tunnel, carrying a basket toward us. I saw he was a very old man, stooped and wrinkled, a dirty black old fellow covered with mud. He set his basket down and faced us, peering with yellowed eyes.

M'kowa spoke to him in Swahili. "They left you, old man? What are you doing?"

The man answered briefly. I understood a word or two, but M'kowa translated. "Says he was chosen to put the clay on the outside."

Surprisingly the old man spoke a faltering, jumbled sort of English. He jerked his head when he spoke, setting a necklace of feathers to jiggling.

"Bula Matari talk-talk you go south. You find man-plague?"

"It is too late," said M'kowa. "Open the cave and let us in. What is your name?"

The ancient black shook his head vigorously. "Too late open cave. Name, Wobumba. Now you die alongside Wobumba." He grinned toothlessly.

A clamor reached my ears from within the plastered cave. Cackling old voices,

men and women, shrilled at us in a dozen dialects.

Wobumba grinned some more and began to plop on more mud from his basket. He patted the clay thickly on the wall, where it dried hard.

M'kowa shouted at the wall. "Tell this old man out here to let us in!"

Another chorus of cackles from within, and then one voice rose. "No! No! Go away. Wobumba is elected to die."

M'kowa shrugged. "Shall I tear it down, Bwana!"

I looked at Wobumba, who leered back at me. I saw only fanatic determination in his face. "I doubt it would help," I said. "This old fellow would probably refuse to cooperate and wall us up, or if he got a chance, he might reconsider his desire to stay out here, and insist on coming in with us. Besides, the old folks would be pretty much peeved. They might resent our intrusion—with knives."

"You are right, Bwana, but we can not stay here."

Wobumba slapped the last of the mud on the patch and laughed. "Wobumba die. White Master die. Young sprout die."

"Go on through the passage," I ordered. "Wobumba, you are finished here. Come with us. Perhaps we can find a way to one side and get out of the path of the devils."

Wobumba shook his head. "Has White Master magic strong enough to carry him like a bird? There is no way out from the tunnel, except go back."

"But I see daylight ahead!" I protested. "Surely we can get out at that end?" I started off through the passage. The old man cackled gleefully, capering behind me. "Die now," he repeated. "Die now!"

I kept on, but when I discovered that my pace was much too fast for the old one, I realized that I was almost running. I forced myself to slow down.

AT THE end of the tunnel we were met by another rocky spectacle. The light had faded quickly; an evening gloom shrouded the scene. The passage gave out over a narrow gorge running north and south, a deep shadowed cleft between magnificent cliffs. It was a narrow strip of ground blocked at the farther end by a rocky eminence, bordered by sheer walls of gray stone. The light was almost gone, and grew fainter by the minute. I was sure that in daylight some great peak could be seen above us.

There was a drop of over thirty feet from the tunnel mouth. Wobumba pointed down with a skinny arm. "White Master see! Can not go down."

Below us the face of the rock was sheer. There was an accumulation of muddy, clay dirt just inside the tunnel where Wobumba had filled his basket. M'kowa squatted on the slippery edge of the rock, measuring hand and toe holds with his eyes. I was sure that old Wobumba could never make the climb down.

"We may have to get a rope from my gear, M'kowa," I suggested. "Unless we can find a vine that will serve." A strange impatience rose in me. I looked back through the tunnel the way we had come.

There was nothing to be seen any more than there had been before. The sun was dipping behind the western hills, already the lower tangled growth was in darkness. Then I was struck an almost physical blow. I recoiled from the impact of a force as powerful as it was sudden.

It was only a sound, but a sound so prodigious that it had a material strength. Perhaps the narrow confines of the long, straight tunnel acted as an amplifying means to swell the volume of that noise to shocking immensity. A blast of sound struck me, a clear, high note that deafened me while it threw me back on my heels. It was a sound such as might come from the throat of a tortured land, a land overwhelmed by a tide of evil.

M'kowa cried out and put up an arm to stop me, but my heels were moving on a slippery rock floor, slabs covered with glistening clay. I had no voice. I was paralyzed with shock and amazement at the outpouring of sound from the mouths of the man-plague entering the valley. Wobumba's old face flashed before my eyes, a horrified mask of terror. I dropped like a stone to the floor of the gorge below.

I did not completely lose consciousness. Through a red haze of pain I saw M'kowa climb slowly down the face of the rock, with Wobumba clinging to his back. My guide climbed slowly, using all minute hand holds and crevices for toe holds he could find, until after what seemed an hour he

crouched beside me. Wobumba was shaking nearby.

I was stretched out on a grassy knoll, dizzy and sweating, with a fractured leg. My knapsack which had been at my waist, was under my hip bone as I fell, acting somewhat as a cushion. I was bruised and shaken, but the break in my left leg was a clean one. The scream of the man-plague was gone; at least I no longer heard it.

"The wet clay caused Bwana to fall," remarked M'kowa. He evidently was not going to mention the sudden sound we had heard. I could scarcely believe it then, after the first shock. I was still regarding the whole thing as unbelievable, yet I had heard the creatures, heard the awful noise of their combined screams, and had broken my leg because of them. Suddenly I no longer pretended to myself that I doubted the man-plague.

In the rapidly failing light of the gorge, M'kowa was as gentle as he could be with my leg. With cut bamboo and strips of cloth torn from some of my gear from my knapsack he managed splints. When he was done we once more considered our plight.

"We must go on, Bwana," M'kowa said.

"But I can't," I protested.

"M'kowa will not leave you here," he maintained. "There must be a way on from here. I will take Bwana with me."

My guide pulled his knife out of his belt again and hacked away at a length of thin strong vine curling down from the trees about us. He cut it in several lengths and put them beside me.

First M'kowa contrived a strong light litter of slender bamboo trees, bound together with vine at the ends to make a bed roughly seven feet long by two feet wide. He filled the spaces between the rods with grass and moss. Then when I had rolled onto the litter, M'kowa bound me to it with thongs under my arms, at my waist and over my good leg. The broken member was held stiff in splints of split bamboo and anchored solidly so that it would not move.

My guide looped a length of thong at the head of my litter and another at the middle. The two loops he brought together to form a wide double yoke into which he could thrust his head and shoulders. When he was ready he shrugged into the harness, carrying me on his back like an Indian papoose, only bigger and heavier by far.

I tried to put on a front of calmness I did not feel. "Here we are in the path of the flood again," I observed. "I'd like for once to get out of the way of whatever is coming along."

"There is only one way to go, Bwana," said M'kowa. "We must keep traveling. As I remember, the man-plague is supposed to appear at dawn."

"Yes," I said. "But that doesn't say when they will overrun us. If they have a long way to go from here, wherever they're going, they are liable to be along at any moment. I agree we ought to get moving."

Both M'kowa and I looked at Wobumba as though his familiarity with this territory gave him greater knowledge of what to expect. The old man simply grinned back at us.

"There is some kind of path, Bwana," M'kowa said, looking ahead as well as he could in the half-dark, "but it seems to rise rapidly."

"Let's hope we can get around to the other side of one of these rock piles," I said. "There must be a way over the top, even if we can't get through."

M'kowa let himself into the harness and started off. I was surprised at the ease with which he carried me. Even the jolting as M'kowa walked affected me very little, since most of my weight was suspended from my shoulders. Then, too, I suppose that the shock of my fall, and the cause of it, had not completely worn off by that time. I know that my mind was in such a turmoil that it is no wonder I felt no physical pain.

WE WENT upward in a tortuous winding route, along a shoulder of the mountain. Looking back, after a few minutes of steep climbing, I could not even see the tunnel from which we had emerged into the gorge. The last of the twilight was touching only the rocks above us; the gorge was in shadow. The jiggling motion of M'kowa's steady pace lulled me for brief moments.

It seemed that we went on for a long time, up and always up. Wobumba staggered along behind me, bent and knobby,

his feathers quivering, his bangles clinking. I had no idea of how long we climbed. I know that M'kowa was barely winded, even carrying such a burden as my weight. I remembered with thankfulness that my guide was a superbly strong and long-enduring man. If it were not for his magnificent body at that time, there would be nothing for me to put down here of that fantastic flight through the black, rocky slopes of the country to the north of the Wamuntee valley.

I had no idea of how high we were, but as time went on, and M'kowa plodded up through the cooling air I reckoned we must have climbed thousands of feet.

Several times M'kowa stopped and rested the lower edge of my litter on the stony path, breathing for a few moments, then going on. Wobumba grew less and less evident as night thickened, huddled over, laboring silently upward. Only his blear old eyes were visible at times, his dull skin blending with the background of night.

I was quite cold. I imagined the old man must be more so, for he was practically naked. At last the steep path leveled off and we reached a flat ledge where the rocks were smooth and there was almost no grass. It was too dark to see much, but when M'kowa set my litter down I discerned against the cold luminous sky the silhouette of the mountain peak we were ascending.

It must be Margherita Peak we were on, I reasoned, and we should be half way up the 16,800 foot landmark. The top of the peak was a crest of snow, glimmering far above in cold starlight. We were close to the brink of a precipice, which I judged to be the gorge we had left below. So we had not rounded the shoulder of the mountain after all, but had risen almost vertically above our starting point, however round-about had been our path.

I unfastened my knapsack straps and fished my chronometer from it. It was after midnight. We had been climbing for at least four hours. I realized that dawn was only a few hours away, for the night breaks early in these latitudes. M'kowa squatted beside me and felt for my vine ropes, strengthening them and taking up every little bit of slack. Wobumba reclined on his face on the rocks, relaxed and still.

"Now what, Bwana?" asked M'kowa. "Do you think we should go higher? I thought this path might take us around the mountain, but it has not."

"I had the same idea," I answered. "I suppose we'd better wait for daylight."

"Yes, Bwana." M'kowa stretched out, resting as comfortably as he could on the bare rock ledge. He squirmed about, fitting his bones to the surface of the rocks. I watched him thinking of what a steadfast, loyal man he was. If either of us showed any fear, it was not M'kowa.

I lay looking toward the brink of the abyss so near me. After a long time I closed my eyes. When I opened them again a shaft of light was thrust over the shoulder of ice-capped Margherita Peak. Dawn was tumbling into the barren rocky fastnesses about us.

After a few minutes I pulled my litter to the edge of the cliff and looked over. The effort made my leg ache. Shooting pains stabbed my hip; that was my first real pain from my injury in all the time since I suffered the fracture.

IV

MY FIRST impression on looking over was a sense of disappointment in the fact that the gorge was not nearly as deep as I had expected. The sun was mounting higher behind me, but its rays did not yet penetrate the cleft. Merely a pool of blackness lay before me. Wisps of foggy air curled upward as the sun warmed the rocks, rising from the gorge in slow spirals.

Gradually I was able to see deeper into the black pool. Behind me M'kowa lay, his face buried in his arms. Wobumba, also lying near me, looking more like a skeleton or a dehydrated fossil than a man. I turned back to look into the pit again, feeling guilty for the predicament in which these two found themselves.

My leg began to ache horribly. I was cold and stiff, but at least I was able to forget the pain somewhat in watching the depths of Margherita Gorge reveal its secrets. At least I was able to discern what I took to be some varying-sized boulders lying on the floor of the gorge. As the winding mists lifted away the air became clearer. Suddenly a flash of light entered the gorge, filling it with a yellow and white radiance. Glancing over my shoulder I saw

that the sun had cleared a crest and now cast its rays through a narrow crevice between the northern spur of Margherita and an unnamed neighboring peak. The light sprang from one reflecting surface after another in the gorge below, spraying downward, making the entire inner surface of the gorge radiate a brilliance which lightened the floor so far beneath me. Now I saw that the "boulders" were really trees, round great balls of foliage filling the cleft from wall to wall. They were a yellowish-green in color, still seeming to be miniature in size from my great height.

The saffron radiance filled the gorge for hundreds of feet upward. Breathtaking as was the beauty of the scene, my haggard eyes returned always to the bottom of the pit. What I expected to see I could not have said, but as dawn arrived I marked its presence. Now is the time for the leaf-colored devils to appear.

As I thought of the expression "leaf-colored devils," my eyes stared harder at the foliage of the trees below. There must be some connection between that eerie yellow radiance in the gorge and the vividly descriptive term applied to the manplague. I watched the trees, not knowing why.

It was more or less natural that under the strain of watching I should see movement in the trees. Tiny flickerings, vague shiftings, uncertain movements here and there. For awhile I reasoned that the great distance was deceiving me. Then suddenly and silently there seemed to break from the leafy floor of the cleft a radiation of movement, a streaking of yellowish-green color, tiny dots of saffron hue, bursting in myriad lines from the trees.

Hardly daring to take my eyes from the scene I called to M'kowa. Instantly he crouched at my side, then peered over the brink. A great sigh escaped his lips at what we saw.

A wave of saffron surged against the base of the cliff, rushing like a tide to the foot of the wall. The floor of the cleft seemed to boil with a colorful turbulence; a crest of a wave of color broke again and again over the rocky foot of the sheer precipice. As M'kowa and I watched, stupefied, some black lines appeared to break through the surface of the foaming mass of yellow-green. Limbs of trees, I realized; and knew that the depth of that pool of devils was diminishing. Then I knew why. The flood of living saffron was ascending the face of the gorge!

Soon it seemed the trees in the pit were still again. They were sparser in foliage, bare patches showing the rocky floor. The pool had emptied itself by flowing upward, up the side of the mountain toward us.

M'kowa breathed in my ear. "Bwana, this is our time!"

I was still unbelieving. There must be so many of those devils it would be impossible to count them. I understood the reason M'lune had said he had seen a pool of devils sixty to seventy feet deep empty itself . . . with none of the imps on the bottom being crushed. They filled the chasm from end to end and from wall to wall, so numerous that they filled every inch of the tall trees and covered the ground. When they broke and flooded upward, it was like a pool being drawn off from the top.

They came like a solid torrent of flesh. "Can you see any one of them?" I asked M'kowa. "To me they seem all one great mass."

"Can't see anything but yellow, Bwana." M'kowa's voice was husky, choked down. Then he jumped up to look around on our ledge. He jostled Wobumba with his foot, shaking the old man out of his torpor.

There was a continuation of the path upward, but as I looked at it I felt the futility of further climbing. When M'kowa got to the top, if he could with me on his back, what then?

MY FRANTIC thoughts were troubled by an undertone of faint sound coming from over the brink. It started like the siren on a police car approaching at high speed from a great distance. I listened intently to a high whine gathering volume and ascending at an incredibly high pitch. It must be the creatures flooding up the steep and rugged side of the mountain. The sound grew and swelled, hurting my ears, but doing infinitely more to my frayed nerves. The sound was almost a human scream, a weird piercing shriek, but above it, gathering in intensity, drilling inside my head until I thought that if it didn't stop it would burst my brain. I looked up at M'kowa, who stood regarding the upward path uncertainly.

"No good!" I had to shout to make M'kowa hear me. I shook my head. "No use going further! Run, M'kowa! Go on. Try to keep ahead of them!"

M'kowa stood where he was. "No, Bwana." He listened with me for a moment to the swelling, sibilant scream rising to us. Then he knelt at the cliff edge again and looked over. "Maybe we can make it!" he yelled over his shoulder. "They're still a long way off. We will go on together."

I gestured silently to old Wobumba. M'kowa nodded his understanding. He tugged at my litter and lifted it on end. "We have a chance," he said in my ear. "Bwana, we go!" As he slung the vine harness over his head, he routed out Wobumba with his foot. The old man staggered to his feet blindly. Without pausing M'kowa slung the litter on his back and stumbled upward along the narrow path.

It looked so futile. Far above I could see the snowy cap of Margherita Peak many thousand feet away. I forgot the cold, but the cold helped to numb my leg. I commenced to calculate our chances, the time we had left before we were overwhelmed, although I knew it would do no more than give me a better idea of when to expect the devouring horde. We had been on a ledge about six thousand feet above the valley floor.

Figuring pace and distance roughly the best I could count on was four to five minutes headway.

Scanning the path over my shoulder as M'kowa struggled upward, I found no hopeful avenue of escape. The best we might expect was a delayed annihilation . . . or a miracle. Listening to the ear-piercing shriek of the devils pursuing us relentlessly and inevitably as time, no miracle seemed imminent.

My sturdy black turned his head to make me hear him. "Bwana! This path must go somewhere. There has to be a reason for a path!" Then, while my neck was twisted to catch M'kowa's words, I saw something. Saw it before M'kowa did.

"A cave!" I shouted. "M'kowa, a cave!" I suppose I screamed the words.

M'kowa stopped. I raised my arm and pointed. Less then twenty feet off the narrow path a small black hole had suddenly flashed before my eyes. Now it was hidden again by a large projecting outcropping.

"There!" I shouted. "I saw an opening a second ago. Move back a few feet."

As M'kowa backed down the path I watched for the opening with strained eyes. "There! There!"

M'kowa saw it too. He turned off the path and climbed carefully along the side of the rock to the place we had seen. It was a small opening in the side of the mountain. Wobumba scrambled after us and ducked to look into the mouth of the cave.

I prayed that it might be a deep one. The scream of the huge pack grew louder as M'kowa released himself from the carrying thongs of my litter. When I was resting on the slanting rock I saw that we had arrived at what might be another eroded tunnel. It was only four or five feet high, how deep I could not tell. We could not see beyond the circle of light from the opening.

"Inside, M'kowa!" I shouted. Whether or not we could escape the horde in that tunnel, I accepted it as our last refuge. I was through with "walking backwards in front of a fast train. "Inside!"

M'kowa stopped and backed into the tunnel dragging my litter. Wobumba attempted to help him, but succeeded in doing little more than annoying my feet. Immediately we traveled a few feet from the entrance, we were in darkness. M'kowa went on, doubled over, dragging me over the rough floor of the passage. I watched the circle of light which was the entrance diminish in size until I judged we were fifty feet inside the mountain. With each foot of our progress my hopes rose. The shrill siren of the pool of devils faded, became an eerie ghost cry far away. As the noise of those hungry millions of throats diminished I could hear Wobumba's old voice mumbling interminably over my feet.

Then a bend in the tunnel shut off the light behind us. M'kowa slowed, stepping carefully, breathing in great gulps of air. The tunnel was damper there, cold as in the bowels of a glacier, bleak and icy. Still M'kowa dragged me backward. His breath rasped painfully above me.

"Enough!" I cried. My voice was loud and strange. There was an hysterical quality to it. "Enough!" I repeated.

M'kowa set me down. I could hear him turning on the rough, gravel littered floor.

"Bwana, maybe we made it? I wonder how far we can go in this cave!"

"It seems to be a level tunnel," I said quickly. "The mountain is only a few hundred feet through at this point, I think. It seemed that way from below. Maybe it goes right on through."

M'kowa paused a moment. "No light at the other end. Maybe there's a bend . . ."

"Take a look," I said. "Go forward and find out. Be careful, M'kowa."

"Yes, Bwana. You all right?"

"I'm all right," I said. My voice was under control.

"I will soon be back."

M'KOWA moved ahead in the blackness slowly. There was nothing for me to do but lie there in the dark and stare unseeing at whatever was above me. The old native Wobumba crouched beside me, still mumbling untintelligently. His presence was small comfort to me.

Only a minute had passed. A noise in the tunnel told me of M'kowa's return. He scrambled over the gravel and crouched over me. "Bwana! There is a hole in the floor there! We can not go through! Has Bwana a light?"

I still had my knapsack slung at my side. "Matches," I said.

I opened my pouch and felt for M'kowa's hand.

"A big hole, Bwana," M'kowa went on hurriedly. "I could not reach across it. I thought of something, too. Maybe I have good idea . . ." He took the matches and turned away. "I will be back in a minute. Hold, Bwana!"

I pictured the onrush of the swiftly approaching mass of gibbering beasts. Could I wait another minute? M'kowa was back in less than that. He lit a match to look at me.

"That hole is very big, Bwana! We can not cross it." M'kowa spoke rapidly. The match died away. "The hole stinks, too, Bwana. I could not see far in it; it must be very deep. I think perhaps it is a deep nest . . . a place to hibernate . . .? The monkeys, whatever they are, they must go in that hole."

"Monkeys don't hibernate," I said. "In hot climates . . ."

"But I have idea, Bwana. There is a chance to cross, if you are willing. Maybe I can do it." M'kowa waited for me to speak.

I tried to fight down a growing excitement, a terrible hope. "I'll take any chance," I said quietly. "Do what you can, M'kowa."

My guide bent lower over me. "The hole is six feet over, Bwana. It has good safe edges." He rapped on my litter with his knuckles. "I thought while I was studying it; if I had a plank I could throw it over and walk across. Then I thought . . . I thought of the litter I made for you."

I gasped. The idea of being tossed over a stinking hole in the bowels of the earth, to be used as a bridge!

"Not if you don't want to, Bwana."

I found my voice, made it calm. "Of course, M'kowa. It's a hope. Hurry!" As I spoke, a sudden break in the sound of the climbing devils struck our ears. Wobumba shouted. "Man-plague!" It was the same shocking sound I heard before.

I realized quickly that the horde of creatures had gained the lip of the precipice where we had spent the few hours before dawn, and now their clamor reached us more strongly because they were so near; and because they had risen above the wall which screened their noise. We had only seconds to move.

M'kowa grasped the head of the litter and dragged it backwards over the tunnel floor. Wobumba could not help. I heard his faltering footsteps following behind us. In spite of the damp chill my leg ached horribly with each bump.

Then with an explosive roar the leaders of the immense pack hit the entrance to our tunnel. The siren note of their million howling throats rose to a hideous pitch; the whole tunnel vibrated with the wild patter of their tiny feet; the air roared about us.

M'kowa stopped. "This is the end." He took an instant to strike a match, to check his sight on the pit. I could not see it from my position. I thought it was just as well. M'kowa raised my litter on end and turned me so that I faced the pit, head up, staring into the blackness. I heard M'kowa pass his webbed belt through the thongs at the back of my head, and form a noose through the buckle. Then slowly I felt myself being lowered, face down over the pit.

Grunting and straining M'kowa eased down the litter until I was horizontal. The thongs at my waist and shoulders took most of the weight, since M'kowa had tightened them. Although I could see nothing, the foul air of the pit rose in sickening force, pressing against my face. The upper end of the litter touched the ground on the farther side of the pit. The roar in the tunnel increased, the whine and chitter of the scurrying creatures was almost upon us.

I heard M'kowa's voice, urging Wobumba to cross the bridge.

"No! No!" Wobumba quavered. "I fall!"

M'kowa cursed in obscure dialect. Then he spoke again, in English. I spent a terrified moment in fear that Wobumba's timidity or stubbornness would ruin us all. If the devils of the pool swarmed upon us then, there would be little left to tell of it! I sweated in the cold air of the pit, my stomach quivering, my leg aching. The litter was none too secure across the abyss. It rocked slightly.

Then M'kowa shouted in Swahili again, in phrases I understood. "I go first! I show Wobumba. Follow me!" I felt him step on the litter and cross. "Follow!" he shouted. "Follow!"

The belt back of my head was loosened, and fastened again at the foot of the litter. M'kowa was preparing to draw up the litter-bridge. He put a slight strain on the belt and thongs. Again he screamed at Wobumba, "Follow!" His voice was almost drowned in the sibilant roar, the shrill howling of the approaching creatures. As in a painful fog I heard Wobumba say, and his voice was calmer, "But no! I fall. Better this way. Pull!"

The fool was stubbornly insisting that he had been meant for sacrifice and that it was better that he stop fighting against his destined fate. I felt my feet rising, and then drop suddenly. There were two heavy steps on the upper end of my litter. At first I thought that Wobumba had hurried across, but then I realized with a shock that M'kowa was not accepting Wobumba's resignation to his fate. I heard M'kowa shout, Fool!" Then a lighter step on the litter, going over. The litter was roughly grasped by my feet and lifted strongly. M'kowa was throwing the litter up by force, turning me upside down. A last push sent the litter upright, where it teetered briefly. I was hanging head down, the bamboo saplings rocking on end, on the far brink of the pit.

V

THE shrill scream from the throats of the devils was unbearable. It assaulted my ears, my whole body. In my horrible position I was dizzy and pain-befuddled. I was blinded by a red wave of searing agony. To add to my horror I saw that the tunnel was filled with wildly leaping, tumbling fighting creatures, choking the passage from floor to ceiling. A strange and unearthly luminosity filled the space before me. Across the black square hole in the floor M'kowa stood facing me, and hard behind him lunged a crawling mass of fanged beasts made all the more horrible by their small size. Then in the eerie glow which came from their bodies, possibly from their short thick fur, they were at the edge of the pit.

M'kowa was transfixed. His face was shadowed, but around him the phosphorescent or electric glow silhouetted his figure . . . but only for an instant. I saw tiny malicious faces, with long sharp fangs, grinning evil faces, and claw-like feet and hands. They mounted M'kowa's body as he stood there, covering him like a swarm of rats, his body, his shoulders, his head; until I could see nothing of him, only a form of squirming creatures outlined in the weird light. If M'kowa made any sound I did not hear it.

Wobumba must have grasped my litter as it rocked on the edge of the pit, for it steadied. As he lowered me weakly my staring eyes saw across the pit in a swaying, slanting view. I saw the foremost of the creatures jump into the pit, then more and more, then in literally a stream, a cataract. M'kowa's body swayed forward, writhing. His size seemed to diminish. He shrank before my eyes, until the form of him toppled slowly and fell in the pit. I never heard him strike.

I lay quivering in the dark. Unless I looked across the pit I could detect no sign of the luminous glow. Wobumba breathed wheezingly beside me. I was lying on my litter, my head toward the pit. The screaming clamor was gone, to a great extent. I

knew I had fainted, but I had no idea of how long I had been out. When I twisted my head and looked across the square hole I could see a fainter glow, near the floor of the tunnel. Dimly I could see a shallow stream of the last of the tiny, monkey-like creatures racing to the pit, jumping down without pause at the brink. There was a little sound from the pit when they struck some firm ground, a sort of steady dripping. I judged that they must fall about twenty feet below. Then as I shuddered convulsively at the recollection of M'kowa overwhelmed by that first ferocious rush, the flood thinned. The patter died away, the whining note grew less and less, and then it stopped. The silence was deafening. Finally I could hear beneath us a subdued, far-away twittering, as of a tree full of birds. Somewhere in the earth below, the man-plague gathered. I could imagine huge caverns in the earth, a festered womb of evil, fed by sloping corridors and chimneys, to which those devils rushed and where they congregated. Wobumba and I were left to conjecture on what might befall us now.

For hours I lay in what must have been a fevered hysteria. In brief intervals I asked myself again and again why M'kowa had not come across the litter himself after he had practically thrown Wobumba over it. The answer was all too clear. He had seen there would not have been time to cross and pull me up before the onrushing animals reached me. I did not want to face it, but the answer was inevitable. M'kowa had sacrificed himself for Wobumba and me. Then I would groan in pain and anguish and time would pass, only to bring me again to the cruel realization of M'kowa's heroic act.

Wobumba crouched close to me, mumbling and shaking. We both feared a possible return of the devils in the pit, or perhaps more of the hideous imps running through the tunnel. After a long time I began to speculate on our predicament. Wobumba was much too weak and unsure of himself to aid me out of the tunnel. He could never manage the feat of lowering and raising my litter as a drawbridge to aid our escape.

But in the end my escape was due to Wobumba, after all. It must have been dark outside, when the old fellow recovered somewhat from his panic, and began to function normally.

I had long since finished my writing in my notebook and had tucked it under my litter when Wobumba stirred restlessly and moved about, crouching in the low tunnel. Then he came near me and spoke.

"I am afraid, White Master," mumbled Wobumba.

"Then stay," I said. I didn't care.

"Perhaps if we go back the way we came . . ." Wobumba hesitated.

"How?" I demanded. "Can you jump that pit? Can you lift my litter?"

"I cannot jump the pit, but, if the White Master will allow, I can untie his thongs. I can lift the litter without him on it."

"Of course!" I hurriedly plucked at knots as I spoke. "Untie me quickly!"

It was only a moment's work to slip my bindings and roll off the litter. I was past caring about my leg. Wobumba slid the litter out over the pit, and I helped him, lying on my stomach. I put the muscles of my forearms and wrists into the support of the saplings as we reached for the far side. It was not too difficult.

When the litter was in place Wobumba looked at me. "Will the White Master cross too?" It was a useless question. I had already pulled myself forward by my hands and was inching my way over our precious bridge. I dared not look down into that horrible abyss. I kept my face up, like a frightened child. Wobumba followed, on his hands and knees, and when we were over we pulled in the litter.

The return of that circle of light which marked the entrance of the tunnel was like a rebirth. It was dark outside, but stars and a tropical moon reflected a pale silvery light against the rock walls.

The next few weeks I lay mending in the conference hut of Bula Matari. I watched the meetings, the everyday business of the tribe, the little events of village life. Sometimes I thought of M'kowa, but I never pictured him as merely a guide after that. I knew the nobility of his heart, the stoic strength and fearlessness of his life. I will never forget the sacrifice he made for me.

And no matter how I try, I will never forget those grinning, leaf-colored devils!

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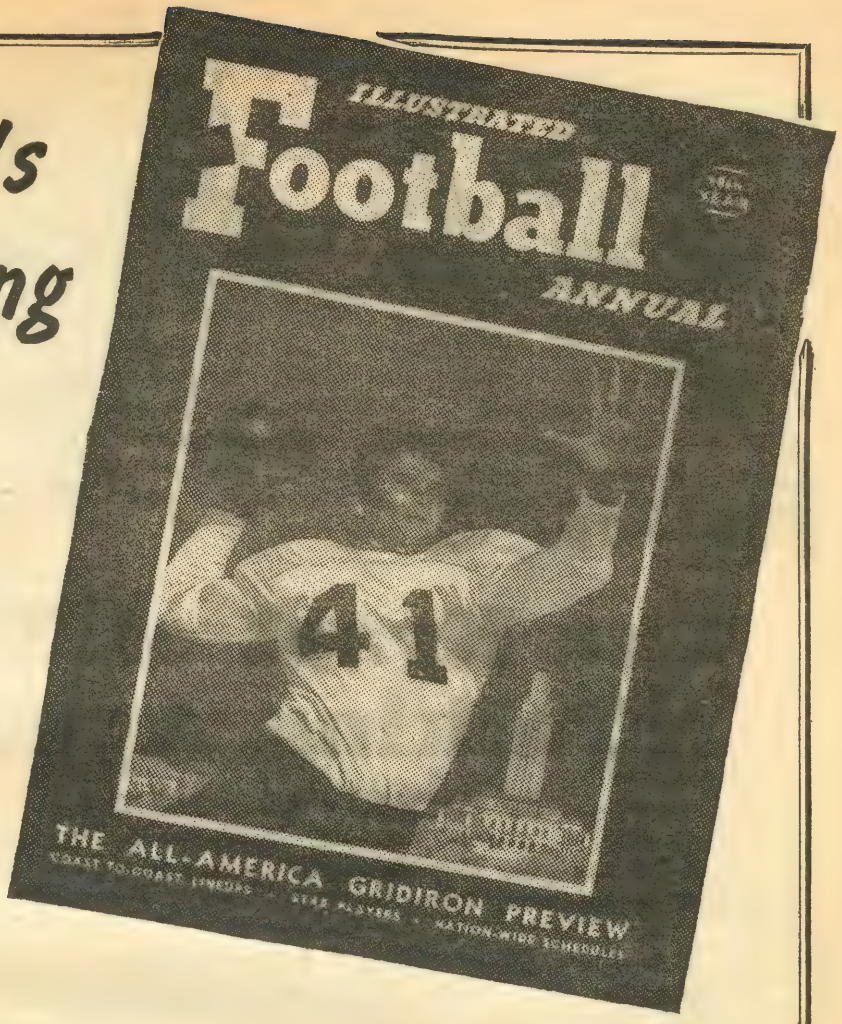

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The Kraal of The Talking Apes

By EMMETT McDOWELL

. . . and as Thoth the Terrible led Jesse and Diana into the lost tombs of Hanno a thousand ape-voices screeched: "Man! Kill—Kill—Kill!"

LONG LEGGED AND LEAN IN A pair of khaki shorts, Jesse Quinn sprawled in a rattan chair and tried to read a paper-backed French novel. He kept losing the thread of the story.

Thunder muttered threateningly in the distance. Through the windows he could catch glimpses of the sky and the rushing attack of billowing black clouds.

There was wind up there. It descended low enough to brush the tree tops. But in the compound itself the air was breathless. The bungalow was like a steam bath.

He could hear the leopard outside stalking back and forth in its cage. "Pad—pad—pad." Then it sprang against the bars and screamed and the monkeys set up a terrified chattering.

He ran his hand through his damp, copper-brown hair. His slate-blue eyes were tinged with worry. He hoped nothing happened to the leopard. It was a large specimen, and he had an order for it from a Kansas City wild animal dealer who supplied the smaller zoos and menageries back in the States.

This was Jesse Quinn's second venture since the war into the great equatorial rain forest of South Cameroon. His first had been made in partnership with a French cocoa planter, a girl by the name of Diana Sorbier, and had proved moderately profitable. Still they couldn't afford many losses, now that the business partnership had turned into something else — a *business* marriage.

Diana had gone to Ambam in the Ford pick-up for supplies, but she should have returned hours ago. He wondered what was keeping her.

"Wife!" he thought savagely. If he'd known that Diana would stick to the crazy terms of their marriage, by heavens, he wouldn't have married her!

"It—it is expedient," she'd said blushing furiously; "that we become married if we are to continue in business together!"

They'd been in the girl's hotel room in New York at the time; and Jesse'd grinned, knowing what troubled her. The grin had been unfortunate.

"Nom de Dieu!" Diana'd burst out. "Must everyone always suspect the worst? Because I go into the jungle with you after wild animals, does it mean that I sleep with you?"

Again and again Thoth sank the green blade deep into the cat's vitals.

"No," Jesse'd assured her. "Unfortunately, it doesn't!"

"And you! Why do you sit there and grin like the hyena?"

He'd quit grinning. But the damage was done. Diana's green eyes'd narrowed indignantly.

We will be married at once," she'd informed him. "But do not allow yourself to get ideas. It will be the business arrangement — strictly!"

JESSE lit a cigarette, blew out a cloud of blue smoke. Perhaps if he hadn't grinned . . .

A bolt of lightning hissed down with a greenish glare. The accompanying clap of thunder was deafening.

He jumped nervously. He could hear the bars rattle as the leopard flung himself against them. The monkeys were whimpering in fright.

Then the cat hurled himself against the bars again.

There was a sudden splintering crash!

Jesse was on his feet, sprinting for the door. He paused only long enough to snatch his .357 Magnum Smith and Wesson revolver from its holster before plunging onto the veranda.

The compound was in pandemonium. Monkeys screamed. Birds squawked. There were frightened yells from the native quarter, the slap of bare running feet.

Then Jesse saw the cat.

He had broken from his cage. The big, snarling ebony brute was crouched down between a cage full of Colobus monkeys and the baby elephant's pen.

The cat made a short snarling rush; and the boys scattered like chickens!

"The rope!" Jesse shouted. "Luka! Get the rope!"

The cat retreated between the pens. It was eyeing the high wall of the compound in panic. Any minute now it was going to make a dash for freedom.

Fidele, the gunboy, broke from the bungalow carrying Jesse's double barrelled, Holland and Holland.

The leopard made a feint at him.

Then the gunboy did an unforgivable thing. He swung the heavy express rifle to his shoulder.

"Don't shoot!" Jesse yelled wrathfully and dived for the offending black. "Don't shoot, you kinky-headed, sonofa—"

His words were drowned in the heavy report!

The leopard's powerful forelegs buckled. It slumped to the mud of the compound, a thin scarlet trickle running from its muzzle.

Jesse balled his fists. His blue eyes blazed as he swung on the hapless Fidele.

"You get your pay," he said in a tone of suppressed fury; "and get the hell out of here!"

The black shrank away from him.

Just then Luka came running up with the rope. He was a giant of a negro, barefooted, in a scarlet tarboosh and a red and brown striped robe. Luka had been with Jesse for years, even accompanying him back to the States with the shipments of animals.

"How much coming to this boy?" Jesse asked him, indicating the sullen gunbearer.

Luka took in what had happened at a glance. He scowled at Fidele, spat on the ground, named a sum.

Jesse handed over the necessary francs, saying: "Settle with him. Then put the boys to skinning the cat." He turned abruptly on his heel, disappeared into the bungalow.

A zig-zag of lightning struck with a crash back in the jungle. The black ominous clouds were still scudding across the sky. A spattering of rain drove the boys to cover.

Luka settled with the gunboy in his own fashion. But first he was careful to take Fidele far enough from the compound that his howls wouldn't reach Jesse's ears.

Luka was descended from a long line of Fulah warriors and slave raiders. He was utterly fearless and he had a way with animals and blacks. With the animals he was patient. But he despised the soft Boulous of South Cameroon as greatly as they feared him.

He returned with a grin on his great rascally face, rattling a handful of francs in the capacious pockets of his baggy white trousers.

While Fidele fled towards Ambam through the rain which had begun to come down in torrents. The black trotted along the muddy road, minus his wages, consumed by a bitter hate.

Over and over he vowed vengeance. But

all the time Fidele knew that he was impotent, that he'd never dare do anything to the white man.

LUKA returned to the compound just in time to open the gate for Diana in the battered Ford pick-up. He grinned and touched his scarlet tarboosh with the rain streaming down his shining black face. He knew all about Jesse's business relationship with this girl, even the odd terms of their marriage.

In fact there was little about Jesse that Luka didn't learn sooner or later. But if he thought it strange that his master and mistress occupied separate rooms, he gave no sign.

Nothing the whites did ever surprised Luka very much.

Jesse came to the door of the red brick bungalow and watched Diana descend from the muddy Ford. She was wearing green jodhpurs, a man's white shirt and a topee.

Her big green eyes peering out from beneath the sun helmet made her look like an impudent street urchin. She dashed through the rain and under the low thatched eaves of the veranda, sailed her helmet onto the couch.

The wet cloth of her shirt clung so faithfully to her small high breasts that it was obvious she wore nothing beneath it. She pulled the material away from her skin with a distasteful gesture.

"You look black as a thunder cloud," she informed Jesse. "Has something happened?"

"The leopard's dead."

"Oh, Jesse, not the leopard! He was such a beauty!"

"It's all in the game," he replied shortly, then relented and explained what had happened.

'We'll have to get another."

"Who shot him? Fidele?"

"Yes."

Diana said: "I am not surprised. I have had trouble with that one. He has been impudent . . ."

"Impudent! Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because—because I did not want you to think I could not handle the blacks." She broke off, gave him a half frightened, half pleading glance. "I have the most astounding news. You can never guess."

"What is it?"

"There is another animal collector at Ebolowa!"

Jesse's blue eyes narrowed. Ebolowa was the administrative seat of the *Region du N'tem* in South Cameroon. It was about twenty kilometers north of Ambam where they did most of their trading.

"Who is he?"

"A Hollander," Diana said. "His name is Schemmerhorn. He is collecting animals for the London Zoo. He is down here after a gorilla . . ."

"Go on," said Jesse grimly.

Diana caught her lip between her teeth, and shrugged her shoulders.

"He is going into the tabu forest across the border!"

"Thoth!" Jesse burst out. "You think he's heard about Thoth?"

"He has heard something," the girl admitted. "Enough to arouse his curiosity at least!"

II

"YOU and your vife are in this business together?" Schemmerhorn asked in astonishment.

Jesse Quinn said, "Yes," dryly and didn't go on. He was clad in wrinkled white pajamas and was sitting across the table from the Dutchman. They were in the dining room of the plantation's bungalow drinking beer. Diana had retired to her room for the evening.

Outside a jackal yap-yapped, then fell silent. It was the forepart of the night and the great carnivores were on the prowl. A frightened expectant hush blanketed the jungle.

The Hollander had shown up at the plantation early in the afternoon of the third day after Diana had brought word of his presence in the neighborhood.

"*Ja,* so I heard in Ebolowa," the Dutchman continued, shaking his head; "but I couldn't believe it."

"No?" said Jesse. "Why not?"

"*Ach!* Animal collecting. It iss a queer game for a voman."

Jesse took a swallow of beer. It tasted cool and tingling in his mouth. Sweat coursed down his bronze Indian-like cheekbones. His limp pajama jacket hung open disclosing the damp tangle of sandy hair on his chest, the washboard of muscle

sheathing his flat belly. His hard blue eyes glinted with suspicion.

What the hell was the Dutchman driving at?

Schemmerhorn's safari was camped outside the compound. They were jumping off in the morning for the tabu area. But beyond that the Hollander had avoided disclosing his plans. Instead he had asked innumerable slyly probing questions.

At length Jesse said: "Plenty of women explorers, photographers, whatnot, have worked with their husbands in Africa."

"*Ja,* that iss so. I can see how a vife vould follow her husband into the jungle. But they said in Ebolowa that you were in business together even before you married."

Jesse stiffened, silently cursed the factors and officials at Ebolowa for a group of gossiping old women.

"That's right. But damned if I see why you're so interested!"

"Do not become offended mine friend." The Hollander pursed thin lips. He was a big man, tall as Jesse, but gross. His cotton-white hair was clipped so close that he looked bald, and his round moon face had been scorched red by the African sun. It was a jolly face except for the thin wide lips and the small pale-gray eyes.

Jesse couldn't recall ever having seen such cold eyes—like bits of milky gray ice! The rest of the Hollander's face might light up with his booming laugh, but not those eyes. They remained alert, shrewd, observant, as if looking out of a mask.

Schemmerhorn repeated: "Do not be offended if I seem curious. I am after a gorilla, *ja.* But I would not go into the tabu area after von.

"I haff been in this game a long time, twenty-two years. I do not believe a white man ever caught a gorilla — only the blacks."

"Then why the devil are you going into the tabu forest?" Jesse asked dryly.

"After a rumor. You look surprised. *Ja,* that iss so. After a rumor. I haff heard of an ape that speaks!"

Jesse's face went wooden. In the silence the buzzing of the insects at the mosquito netting sounded startlingly loud.

"Now," demanded Schemmerhorn, "do you see vhy I haff been questioning you so impertinently?"

"No. I'll be damned if I get the connection!"

"You haff heard of this ape, *ja*?" Schemmerhorn insisted, his pale gray eyes glittering in the lamp light. "He iss a baboon. A drill to be exact. He goes armed vith bows and arrows."

Jesse gave a sharp angry bark. "I've heard of a superstitution among the blacks that a forest demon inhabits the Crystal Mountains. According to the dangoes, it can take the shape of any animal, but usually it shows itself as a baboon. Is that what you're after?"

"*Ja.*"

"But that's rank superstition, man!"

"Iss it?" Schemmerhorn gave Jesse a singularly penetrating look from his pale-gray eyes. "I do not think so. There iss often a grain of truth behind native superstition."

Jesse put his hands in his lap so that Schemmerhorn wouldn't notice the whitening of his knuckles. If the Dutchman actually had evidence of Thoth's existence, Jesse couldn't understand why he had come to him with it.

"I vill be frank vith you," said Schemmerhorn. "I know of your experience vith this ape. I am convinced it iss alive—only vaiting to be caught. I am convinced also you know where it iss!"

"That's sheer rot! You've been listening to the blacks . . ."

"Not altogether. I vill confess, the rumor of a speaking baboon filled me vith amusement at first. But it iss not impossible. Apes haff been taught to speak before. So haff dogs. I vas interested. Then I heard of Doctor Evans' vork mit baboons at Duala before the var . . ."

"So?" said Jesse.

THE Dutchman smiled. "I haff heard a great deal more since then. I heard that you captured this baboon, *Mijnheer,* but vere forced to turn it loose again because the apes kidnapped your vife!"

Jesse's blue eyes twinkled with amusement that he didn't feel.

The Dutchman was substantially correct. And the realization that he had a competitor, especially such a dangerous one at Schemmerhorn, alarmed him. He looked sharply at the German.

He said: "I'm surprised, *Mijnheer,*

Schemmerhorn, that you take any stock in a rumor like that . . ."

The Dutchman brought his heavy fist crashing down on the table!

"*Gotverdomme, Mijnheer* Quinn, do you take me for an imbecile? I know the ape exists! There iss no use lying to me!"

Jesse's blue eyes glinted wickedly. "Suppose it does. What the hell makes you think I'd give you any information?"

"Because I am going to haff that ape! Vith you or vithout you, I vill haff it!" Schemmerhorn's round face was an apoplectic red. "I come to you because I think you know where to find it. I still think so!"

Jesse held onto his temper with an effort. The Dutchman's overbearing attitude made him furious, but he had an idea that that was exactly what Schemmerhorn was trying to do.

He said: "You're off your nut. I don't know where any talking baboon is, and if I did I'd get it myself. I'll be damned if I'd split with you! Is that clear?"

"Von thing iss clear!" growled the Hollander, getting to his feet, his little gray eyes glinting savagely. "You vant the ape yourself!"

He leveled a thick forefinger beneath Jesse's nose. "But let me varn you, *Mijnheer*, I am going to haff it! Since you von't throw in vit me; stay clear of the tabu forest!"

Jesse had risen to his feet with Schemmerhorn. Furious, he told him what he could do with himself in plain Anglo-Saxon words.

The Hollander's bull-like neck swelled. His thick shoulders hunched. His ham-like fist caught Jesse's cheekbone and smashed him half way across the room.

"Py *Gott*, let dot be a varning! Dot ape iss vorth a million pounds und you know it! If I catch you in the tabu forest I vill kill you!"

Jesse's cheek was split, the blood streaming down his face, but he was unaware of it. He was conscious only of a blinding red desire to smash the Hollander to jelly.

Silently he sprang for him.

There was something frightening in that shuffling rush like the charge of a big cat. Schemmerhorn was confident in his brute strength and he was no coward. But he flinched back a step from the fixed glare in Jesse's blue eyes.

Jesse hit him in the belly. It was like striking a padded steel wall. In that instant Jesse realized that not only was the Dutchman big, but he was hard. It was a sobering discovery. It drove the red haze from his brain. He fell naturally into a boxer's crouch.

He hit the Dutchman just above the left eyebrow, opened a gash from which the blood began to trickle down into the eye.

Jesse slashed at him again and again until the eye was puffed and swollen and blinded with blood.

Once Schemmerhorn caught him in the chest, driving the wind out of him, smashing him back into the table.

Table, beer bottles, and Jesse went over with a crash!

His mouth was clamped shut. Except for the whistle of breath through his nostrils and Schemmerhorn's explosive grunts they fought silent as death.

He went to work on Schemmerhorn's right eye with the same precision. Diana, with a robe hugged about her bare shoulders, was peering in horror from the door. But neither man was aware of her presence.

Twice more Schemmerhorn's swinging fists connected. They were terrible blows. They knocked Jesse sprawling as if he'd been made of papier-mache.

But he scrambled to his feet each time with the agility of a monkey, recommenced his relentless sharpshooting at the Dutchman's eyes.

All at once Schemmerhorn straightened and backed off trying to wipe away the blinding blood.

Jesse followed him up and hit him on his jaw.

Schemmerhorn only shook his head, lurched blindly for him with groping outstretched hands.

Jesse hit him again. He set himself, drove his fist against the point of the Dutchman's chin with all his weight and sinew and skill behind it.

The blow cracked like the popper on a whip. Jesse felt an agonizing pain jolt up his arm from his fist. He thought he had smashed a knuckle.

But the Dutchman only staggered. Then with his great blind face turning from side to side in an effort to sense where Jesse stood, he began to grope again for him with

There was something terrifying in the man's vitality, like the savage half blind rushes of the near sighted rhinoceros.

Jesse wrenched a leg from the splintered table. It made a short whistling arc as it descended with a dull thud against Schemmerhorn's skull!

The Hollander toppled to the brick floor.

For a moment Jesse stood panting above him ready to strike again, but Schemmerhorn lay still.

"You have killed him!" Diana said from the doorway.

Jesse shrugged, but he bent over the unconscious Dutchman. Schemmerhorn was breathing heavily, and a large bump was rising where Jesse's club had struck.

"Bah," he said, prodding him with his toe. "You couldn't kill him with an ax."

He went to the window, leaned against the frame and shouted for Luka.

He was still leaning there, getting back his breath, when Luka came on the run.

Jesse indicated the unconscious Dutchman. "Get a couple of boys," he told the black, "and carry him over to his camp and dump him in his tent. Warn his head man to get him off the plantation by eight in the morning."

III

"BWANA! Bwana!" The voice, soft, excited, came from the dark square of the window. Jesse recognized Luka calling, but he was taking no chance. He drew his revolver.

"Stick your head in the window!"

Luka's big rascally face appeared in the opening. By his expression Jesse saw that the black was full of news.

"Did you tuck the Dutchman away in his tent?"

Luka nodded.

"And warn the headman to clear out after breakfast?"

Again Luka nodded.

"Well," asked Jesse; "what's on your mind?"

"Bwana, me see Fidele with the white man's boys!"

"Fidele! The gunboy! The hell you say! What's he doing over there?"

"The white man hired him."

Jesse swore under his breath. So that's where Schemmerhorn had learned so much. Fidele had been working for him when he had captured Thoth before.

"Thanks, Luka. Good work. You can go to bed now."

Luka touched his tarboosh and withdrew.

Jesse paced back and forth amid the wreckage of the dining room, his pajama jacket flapping limply. He lit a cigarette, took a couple of puffs and ground it out.

Suddenly he turned on his heel, crossed the room to the hall, where he halted before a door. A thin crack of light was seeping from beneath the bottom.

"Diana!" He rapped on the panel.

"Is that you, Jesse?" the girl's voice answered.

"Yes. Who the hell did you think it was? Let me in."

"What is it that you wish?" Her voice sounded suspicious.

"I wish," he retorted dryly, "to have the little talk."

"That's what you said last night!"

"Goddamn it!" Jesse roared. "Let me in. It's important!" He pounded on the door.

"Jesse, please!"

"I've a right to come in there. I could get a divorce for . . ."

"For what?"

"For—for . . . Hell, it's something about failing in your conjugal duties." He suddenly began to laugh. "Let me in. I won't lay a finger on you, but I've got to talk to you—tonight!"

He heard the latch thrown off. Then the door opened cautiously, revealing Diana in a pale green robe, caught about her waist with a cord.

Her black hair fell to her shoulders and she was holding a brush in her hand. Her green eyes were suspicious.

"What is it that you must see me about at this hour?"

"Thoth."

It was the completely right pass-word. Jesse made a mental note of it as he followed Diana into the room.

It was a large square chamber with a brick floor and plastered walls tinted rose. There was a canvas ceiling that bulged here and there as some small creature scampered across it, a large old-fashioned bed with a white counterpane, a dresser and a full length mirror on the closet door. Black leopard skin rugs gave it an exotic

tone as in a scene from Anthony and Cleopatra.

Jesse had stuck a plaster on his cut cheek. It gave him a raffish appearance as he stared at the girl.

"*Qu'est-ce que c'est?*" she asked nervously. "What is it?"

"We're going after Thoth."

"No! I refuse, *absolutement!*" She stamped her foot, revealing a long, beautifully proportioned bare leg. "It would be a shame to put him in the cage. It would be like putting a little man there to be gaped at. *Non! Non! Non!*"

"Would you rather Schemmerhorn got him?"

SHE gave him a frightened glance. Ever since returning from the States, Jesse had been trying to persuade Diana to go after Thoth again. He could read the beginning of surrender in the green depths of her eyes, but he wisely refrained from pressing her.

She began to walk back and forth clasping her elbows in her hands, rocking her shoulders.

"Do you think Schemmerhorn will catch him?"

"He's a good man with animals," admitted Jesse ungrudgingly. "One of the best, in fact. If anyone can catch Thoth, he can."

"I . . ." began the girl. "*Mon Dieu,* I know not what to say. It would break my heart to see Schemmerhorn get him."

"Yeh," said Jesse, "it would break more than my heart." He sat down on the edge of the bed, lit a cigarette.

She caught her lip between her teeth. "I—I suppose there is no other course?"

"No. None."

"All right," she agreed miserably. "It is as you say. It is better for us to have him than Schemmerhorn."

"Right," said Jesse. He got to his feet, went to the door, paused with his hand on the knob. "We'll wait until Schemmerhorn clears out in the morning. Then we'll start for the Crystal Mountains."

She nodded without saying anything. Suddenly her head jerked up. "What's that?"

"Where?"

"The window!"

Jesse reached it in a bound, peered out. But after the lighted room his eyes could distinguish nothing in the solid blackness. He thought he heard a soft footfall towards the corner of the bungalow. He called out but only the vast jungle silence greeted his ears.

"Get the flash light," he told Diana in a soft voice.

The monkeys set up an alarmed sleepy chattering. Diana pressed the light in his hand. He directed the beam towards the monkey cage. He was just in time to catch a glimpse of a black figure scrambling over the compound wall.

"Fidele!" he burst out.

"Fidele?" asked Diana. "But I thought you discharged him?"

"I did. Schemmerhorn hired him. Ten to one he's been spying on us." He snapped out the flash, withdrew his head from the window. "Now how much d'you reckon the beggar overheard?"

Diana shook her head, her green eyes enormous.

Jesse gave her a hard glance. "We're going to have trouble with Schemmerhorn. Big trouble. Perhaps you'd best stay here at the bungalow this time."

"No!" She stuck out her chin determinedly. "If we are to trap Thoth, I will be there to see that no harm descends on him. Besides, we are partners. It would not be fair for you to take all the risks—not since I . . ." She colored hotly beneath Jesse's interested stare.

"Since you insist that it remain a business arrangement," he helped her out in a dry voice.

She said: "Yes."

"We can fix that!" Jesse's blue eyes gleamed wickedly. He took a step towards her. "Right now!"

"*Non!*" She retreated until the back of her knees struck the bed and she sat down with a thump. "*Non!*" Suddenly her hand slid under her pillow, emerged with an ugly German Luger.

"Stop!" she cried, and pointed the automatic at Jesse's belly. "Stop or I will shoot!"

Jesse kept walking grimly towards her.

"Jesse! Mother of God! *Comprenez-vous?* I will shoot!" Her hand was shaking violently, the round black muzzle of the automatic making ragged circles. "If there were only a spark of tenderness in

those eyes of yours. But I will never submit like this. Never!"

Jesse reached out and took the gun out of her hand, and tossed it to the pillow.

Diana stared up at him wide eyed.

"Nothing like defending your honor to the death," he said with a chuckle. "Especially from your own husband!" Then he turned on his heel and went out, closing the door behind him.

SCHEMMERHORN'S pale-gray eyes were bleak. He was sitting on a cot in his tent rubbing his knuckles. An ashen Fidele stood before him.

"Vell?" rumbled the Hollander. The cuts above his eyes had been bandaged but his great round face was bruised and battered, and turning green in spots. "Vot did you learn?"

"They see me!" said Fidele in a frightened voice.

"*Gotverdomme!* Didn't I tell you to keep out of sight. I should take the whip to you, you sniveling black idiot!"

Fidele quailed away from him, visibly terrified.

"Did you hear nothing, before they see you?"

"Yes—yes. They go tomorrow to catch baboon!"

The Dutchman smiled painfully. "*Ach!* that iss better. Vhy did you not say so?"

He continued to massage his knuckles, lost in thought. Finally he peered up at Fidele with his little gray eyes.

"Tomorrow," he said, "ve break camp und march avay. *Ja.* Five miles—maybe ten. Then ve stop and vait. You . . ." he thrust his stubby forefinger at the black's chest like a gun muzzle. "You hide in the brush und vatch. Vhen they start oudt, you come und let me know—und don't be seen!"

Fidele nodded.

"Dot iss all," said Schemmerhorn and waved the black out of the tent. But for a long time he muttered to himself in Dutch before he turned out the lantern and went to sleep.

At daybreak, Schemmerhorn's men broke camp and marched away from the plantation towards the border of Spanish Guinea.

An hour later Jesse and Diana at the head of fourteen porters left in the same general direction.

IV

THOTH lay on the ledge in the warm yellow sunshine and squinted reproachfully at the broken bowstring. Little Kee had bitten it in two, and Thoth didn't know how to fashion another.

He reared himself to his haunches and scratched his ugly dog-like head with a gesture so human that it was ludicrous.

It hadn't occurred to the ape that bowstrings could be made. He was a drill, the West African baboon, and to him the bow was dead.

Death was commonplace in the jungle. Thoth could understand death. But that the bow was simply broken and would come to life again with a new string was beyond his present grasp. It wasn't the ape's reasoning ability that was at fault but his experience.

He had never watched a bow being made; he didn't realize they were made. And since his frightening experience with that terrible white man, Thoth had not ventured from the valley high up in the Crystal Mountains of Spanish Guinea.

The valley itself, where Thoth had led the baboon colony like Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt, had proved a promised land. Food was plentiful. The leopards couldn't get at the apes in their caves. And there were none of the man-things, black or white.

Life had been easy. Too easy. Thoth had sunk slowly back into a purely simian existence.

It was not an environment to stimulate the mind. Doctor Evans, who'd taught Thoth to speak, had always believed that the ease with which the apes found their food had retarded their mental growth. Unlike man they were vegetarians, and in the lush tropics there were no famines.

However, Thoth had come to depend on his bow for protection, if not food. He was horribly frightened without it. The broken string gnawed at his mind like a rat at a rope.

He picked it up and shook it angrily. But the bow wasn't shamming; it was quite dead. And he flung it away from him over the ledge in disgust.

There was nothing to it but to leave the valley in search of an encampment of little blacks, where he could steal another.

For Thoth, to think was to act. He arose with a disgruntled, irascible growl and began to descend the cliff.

The face of the towering wall of rock was pockmarked with cave mouths and crawling with baboons. Any of the luckless animals who got in the great drill's path were hurled aside leaving a swath of indignant apes behind him.

When he reached the floor of the canyon, he took to the trees. There had been a great influx of leopards to the valley since the baboon colony had taken up its habitation there. Thoth was almost a match for his old enemy, but he had no desire to meet N'roul, the leopard, without his bow. And so he kept a wary eye on the dripping green arches of the jungle, turning his head from side to side, wrinkling his nostrils to test the air.

The valley itself was a slot in the rugged Crystal Mountains of Spanish Guinea. In some distant age, a river had carved its sinuous course there, but a landslide had diverted the stream. And now only a creek ran along the brush-choked canyon floor, emptying its waters into a small blue lake.

Thoth swung through the branches of the heavy forest giants, their limbs dripping moss, festooned with creepers.

Beneath him, grotesque piles of hewn stone burst through the blanket of greenery —crumbling ruins of the time of Hanno, the Carthagenian, with blank staring windows and doors. Huge trees had sprung up in the streets of the forgotten city, in the courts, from the piles of masonry themselves. Where once a splendid city had filled the canyon from wall to wall, now there remained only an impenetrable blanket of jungle.

So completely had the forest disguised it that the ape had failed utterly to recognize its human origin. Curiosity had impelled him to explore the ruins, peering through the windows into the dark chambers beyond.

He had sniffed the musty scent of Sitha, the great rock python, who considered baboons a prime delicacy. He had caught glimpses of strange still figures of stone with bright red eyes. But these never moved and had no smell and therefore were not dangerous.

Even now as Thoth traveled up the valley above the city, he couldn't refrain from stopping to examine the strange cliffs with their regular rows of cave mouths.

This place had been a temple at one time. Giant trees towered from an inner court. There were airy balconies hung with vines. And a band of monkeys had taken up their abode where once the virgin priestesses had been quartered.

The monkeys scampered up into the topmost branches at the great drill's approach and hurled insults and twigs down at him. But Thoth ignored them as befitted his dignity.

He prowled through the temple, sniffed at the long disused altar, at the splintered ceramic vessels.

A curious yellow gleam amid the debris caught his eye. Thoth scooped away the mould, uncovered a beautiful sacrificial knife with a carved gold hilt in the form of a girl. Its copper blade was corroded pale green.

He turned it over and over in his hands, accidentally pricked himself on the point.

With a grunt, he started to hurl it away, but his surprise at the inanimate metal biting him stimulated his memory. He had seen the blacks use knives. Doctor Evans had taught him what a knife was.

He rumbled: "Knife, knife," out loud. It was a hoarse grotesque sound more like a growl than speech. And his beady intelligent eyes were alive with speculation.

A knife was protection like a bow, only not so good. Still, better than nothing.

This was the thought that kept revolving in his brain. So when he sprang again into the trees, he traveled three legged, holding the knife in one forehand.

But this was inconvenient. And after he had gone a mile or so up the valley, he paused on a big limb and scratched his head and looked at the knife.

The arrows for the broken bow were still threaded on a string around his chest. This was the way he had seen the blacks carry their arrows, and he had merely imitated them.

Now his ugly dog-like face screwed itself into a ferocious expression with the intensity of his thought.

Why not carry the knife in the same fashion?

It was a momentous decision for the ape, a completely original solution. It was the

first step towards independent reasoning, although he failed to grasp the significance of his thoughts.

With a grunt of satisfaction he tore off a short length of creeper and tying it about the haft of the knife with a knot that Doctor Evans had trained him to make, he suspended it about his neck.

As he swung purposefully up the valley it became apparent that everywhere towering walls of rock hemmed him in. The creek was a glistening thread of a waterfall, where it entered the valley, dropping for hundreds of feet to the canyon floor. At one place an ancient road had clung perilously to the cliff's face but a landslide had carried it away, so that now only one short stretch of it remained, leading nowhere.

Still Thoth showed no signs of indecision.

He ran along thick vines, bridging the gaps in the foliage or leaped agilely from limb to limb with the beautiful gold and green sacrificial knife dangling from his hairy brown throat.

Almost at the head of the valley, he turned abruptly into a shallow *cul de sac* in the cliffs and so came to the mouth of a cave.

He approached it warily and sniffed the earth of the cavern's floor. The spoor of N'roul, the leopard, sent prickles of fear coursing down his spine.

Many leopards had come this way!

Thoth very nearly abandoned his quest then and there. But at length he sidled cautiously into the entrance.

The floor of the cavern was hard packed with the coming and going of many padded feet. There were branching corridors, but he stayed unerringly in the right passage. He had been this way three times before. And his memory for places was astounding. Take him over a route once and never again would he forget it.

The passage led on twisting and turning through the mountain, gradually dropping until it emerged in a second canyon very much like the one ha had left except that it was not blocked and offered several means of exit.

The drill trotted dog-like down the gorge until he recognized the spot where he had entered it months before. He scrambled up the wall like a goat, continuing with scarcely a break in his ground devouring gait.

He foraged as he went, devouring insects, roots, and seeds, even fresh green shoots, and night found him perched high up in a rocky pass.

He spent the hours of darkness shivering in fright and loneliness away from the protection of the herd. It was a powerful urge that could drive the ape on a trek of this kind.

He was up and off again shortly before dawn but it wasn't until the next day that he reached the old rockery of the herd. It was deserted now, the trails among the boulders and ledges overgrown.

A spasm of homesickness swept over Thoth. For the second time he almost gave up his quest.

He scouted around the old ledges of his former home for a while, then plunged abruptly into the dense black rain forest that swept two-thirds of the way across Africa.

This was familiar country to Thoth. A host of frightening memories thronged his brain — that abnormally intelligent brain that had so intrigued Doctor Evans, the animal psychologist.

Thoth was traveling through the trees directly above an elephant path. From time to time he paused on a thick limb staring ahead through the dark green jungle.

Once he fingered the collar callous beneath his jaw, rubbed there during the years he had spent in captivity in Douala, while Doctor Evans worked with him, teaching him the rudiments of basic English. In time his scant vocabulary had become so much a part of his thought processes, that he muttered to himself in a gutteral bastard language, half grunts and barks, half English. Even little Kee was picking up the strange words.

ENVIRONMENT is a great teacher. Sparrows hatched and raised by canaries grow to sing like canaries. Dimly the ape was aware of a difference between himself and the other baboons. They couldn't handle the bow. Words were beyond their palate. Only his own blood could grasp these things. And of all his sons and daughters, Little Kee was the most apt pupil.

In the forest there was no breath of

air to warn him of lurking enemies, and Thoth began to move slowly. This was the haunt of N'roul, the leopard. But N'roul wasn't the only beast of prey the baboon dreaded.

This was also the country of the terrible white man!

Here both Thoth and little Kee had been captured. The memory of it could send him into a panic even now.

The white She, all slick and hairless like a grub, except for a black mane on top of her head, had called the man Jesse.

He growled it aloud: "Esse! Esse!" He was unable to form the J.

Not N'roul, the leopard, nor even the memory of Doctor Evans could send Troth off into the paroxysms of fright as the recollection of Jesse Quinn and Diana could do.

Preoccupied with the tense effort of thinking, Thoth became less wary of his surroundings. His first intimation of danger was a scuffing noise in the tree above him. Thoth convulsively flung himself aside. But his laggard senses had betrayed him!

A heavy furry body struck his shoulders like the blow of a deadfall. Talons raked into his hide. The hot foul breath of N'roul, the leopard, filled his nostrils! Panic burst in the ape's brain! He felt his fingers torn from the limb by the force of the cat's spring.

In a spitting growling tangle, cat and baboon tumbled from the tree, struck the hard packed earth of the elephant trail.

The jar loosened the leopard's hold. Instinctively Thoth seized him with his powerful forehands, sank his terrible fangs into the cat's throat. He avoided the leopard's kicking hind legs by a narrow margin. With their murderous claws, one swipe of those pads would have disemboweled the ape.

Spotted cat and grizzled brown drill were a swirling, inextricable mass. They crashed into the underbrush, hideous growls tearing from their throats.

Once the cat's raking talons caught Thoth in the side, bared it to the ribs in a terrible gash. Not for long could he continue to avoid those pumping hind legs.

In his desperation Thoth felt the sacrificial knife banging against his arm. Suddenly, he released the panther, grabbed the knife, snapped the creeper that bound it to his neck.

The cat got in three terrible swipes, laying Thoth's chest and haunches wide open. Blood covered cat and ape, smeared the vines and creepers, muddied the earth.

Thoth could feel the weakness of death enveloping him like a mist. He plunged the knife into the leopard's side.

The cat stiffened convulsively.

Again and again the ape sank the thin green blade deep into the cat's vitals—each blow weaker than the last.

The mist thickened, dimming Thoth's vision. But still he stabbed at the lifeless panther.

Darkness welled up suddenly behind his eyes. He dropped the knife, tried to drag himself off the trail into cover. Then he swayed, sank down slowly beside his old enemy.

The beautiful sacrificial knife was no longer green and gold. It was a bright scarlet from the crown of the dancing girl's head to the needle-like tip of the blade.

V

JESSE QUINN was a quarter of a mile ahead of his porters, striding along with a tireless swinging gait that ate up the miles, when he discovered the two bodies huddled in the trail, still as death.

He halted fifty yards off, regarded cat and baboon narrowly. Dropping the branch with which he'd been keeping off the sweat flies, he pulled his revolver.

It had been one of those rare battles to the death between evenly matched animals, Jesse realized. The baboon must have been alone, else the other apes would have pitched in and torn the leopard to bits.

He advanced slowly. His hard blue eyes flicked here, there observing the signs of terrific combat. The battle must have ended only minutes before he arrived. The blood was still fresh and no hyenas had scented the kill yet.

Then his pupils dilated as they fell on the string of arrows about the great grizzled drill's shoulder.

"Thoth!" he burst out and dropped to his knees beside the ape.

The drill's fur was blood clotted and a swarm of flies buzzed angrily up from

the bodies. Jesse swore under his breath feeling a catch in his throat.

He stifled his first impulse to shout for Diana who was still out of sight behind him, reached for the baboon's pulse. But if Thoth still lived the beat was too faint to detect.

He glanced at the leopard already stiffening in death. Stab wounds! In amazement, Jesse inspected the wounds carefully.

His eyes fell on the scarlet smeared knife, and he gave a low whistle. He picked it up, turned it over in his hands. Curiously he wiped away some of the blood from the delicately carved figure on the hilt. The dull yellow gleam of gold met his eye!

Jesse stared at the knife in disbelief. It was pure gold! His hand began to tremble. Where had the ape found the dagger? Who had fashioned it in the first place?

It looked old. Incredibly old!

He heard Diana's footfalls behind him, then the girl cried out: "Jesse! *Q'est-ce que c'est?* What is it?"

"Thoth! Give me your mirror."

"Ohhh!" The girl's voice was a wail of grief. Her breasts swelled beneath her forest green tunic. "What happened? Is he dead?"

"I don't know. Give me your mirror."

She pulled a small square glass from the pocket of her tunic and handed it to him.

Jesse wiped it off, held it to the ape's nostrils. When he looked at the glass again, it had clouded faintly.

"He's alive," he said rising. "But he's lost a lot of blood. The leopard must have jumped him. Thoth killed him with this." He handed her the sacrificial knife.

"This?" Diana regarded it, her green eyes enormous. "But it is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. It is ancient—*non?* Where could he have found it?"

"It's gold."

"Gold! Yes, yes, so it must be." She glanced down at Thoth. "Can we save him."

Jesse shrugged helplessly, a trick he'd picked up from the girl. "Maybe. We can try."

He knelt beside the ape again, examined its wounds. There were four bad ones, great gashes on chest and side and haunches that had peeled the flesh back until the bone gleamed through whitely.

"If he hasn't lost too much blood, we may be able to patch him up. Worst danger from infection, though. Decayed flesh beneath the cat's claws." He was talking to himself.

From down the trail, he caught the faint chanting of the black porters. It swelled gradually in volume.

"Break out the medicine chest," he commanded Diana. "Then put the boys to constructing a litter."

Without a word, the girl ran back towords the oncoming file of naked porters balancing their loads on their heads. He could hear her shouting excited orders at them.

A regular chorus of surprised grunts broke out among the blacks. They dropped their loads and crowded about Diana.

"The medicine chest!" she shouted, then impatiently she dug it out herself, came running back with it.

Jesse took a last speculative look at the odd dagger and dropped it in his blouse. "Lucky Thoth's unconscious," he said to Diana and set deftly to work. He dressed the wounds exactly as he would have dressed a man's.

HE SHAVED the fur away from the gashes with his own razor. The blacks had built a fire to dispel the oppressive humidity, and Jesse boiled water cleansing the wounds thoroughly, cauterizing them with permanganate. Finally he sewed them up, dusted them with sulfa and bandaged them carefully. The white gauze gave the baboon an uncanny human appearance.

Diana was watching with dilated eyes, one hand clutching her breast. She kept repeating: "Poor beast! Poor beast!" softly in French.

Jesse shot her an exasperated glance. The porters, he saw, were crowding around instead of building the tipoye.

"Get the men to work on the litter!"

Diana looked stricken and feathered into the porters, driving them to cutting poles from which a blanket could be suspended.

But in minutes she was back again, staring over Jesse's shoulder.

"Look!" she burst out. "Look! He wakes!"

Thoth's eyes were open. But they were

lackluster, filled with the fatality of death.

"Thoth," said Jesse leaning over him. "Thoth. Don't be frightened. You're all right now, fellow."

The drill's eyes flickered with recognition. It hadn't been the words, but the tone, soothing, confident, that seemed to have penetrated his consciousness. He contorted his ugly dog-like face in the effort to speak.

"Wa . . ." The sound was weak, gutteral, rasping. "Wa . . ."

"Poor beast," Diana cried, rocking her shoulders in distress. "What is he trying to say?"

"Wada . . ."

Jesse snapped his fingers. "Water! He wants water!"

He seized a canteen, lifted ito the drill's lips. Thoth drank, then let his head sag back.

"He has plenty of life left in him," observed Jesse. "If gangrene doesn't set in, he ought to pull through."

"Should we try to move him?"

"No. But we can't camp here. There's a clearing up ahead if you remember . . ."

"As if it were possible for me to forget!"

The clearing Jesse referred to was the same place where they'd camped once before. It had been there that they'd captured Thoth, and the drills had retaliated by kidnapping Diana and holding her until Jesse had released Thoth.

Jesse grinned faintly. He pointed out four of the boys. "You and you and you," he said, "carry the litter." Then he redistributed the loads among the remaining porters.

There was some grumbling over the extra weight. They were on the edge of the tabu forest and the blacks were frightened.

Ever since slipping across the border of Spanish Guinea, the porters had been nervous, excitable. But they had stuck.

Jesse had been careful in his selection of men this time, hiring the light chocolate Fans, former cannibals and warriors. But superstition was beginning to turn their blood to water.

Not far ahead lay the edge of the tabu area. There was no mark. It didn't look any different from the rest of the dark impenetrable forest. But when they reached it, the blacks would put down their loads and refuse to advance another step.

How they could tell where the tabu forest began was beyond Jesse, but he knew from experience that neither threats nor reason nor bribery could move them. If they were forced across the imaginary line, they would take to their heels at the first opportunity.

He picked up Thoth gently in his arms, deposited him in the litter. The ape's eyes were glassy and he tossed in the blanket.

"He—he has the fever!" said Diana, putting her hand on his wrinkled black forehead.

"It would be strange if he didn't," rejoined Jesse shortly and gave the command to march.

"What's an ape's normal temperature?" Jesse asked, holding the thermometer up to the light.

Diana shook her head, her green eyes worried.

They were standing beside Thoth's cot in the dining tent. They had put the baboon to bed as soon as camp was made.

"Well, he's running a fever," said Jesse. "He wouldn't have a normal temperature of a hundred and three."

He washed the thermometer carefully, sterilized it and returned it to its case.

Diana asked: "What must he eat?"

"Carrots, bananas, sugar cane, boiled rice, sweet potatoes, raw eggs, bread. He'll need plenty of food to get back his strength."

THE fire crackled brightly outside the tent. The flames gleamed on the oily black hides of the porters. The sky was inky. There were no stars, no light except for the dancing flames and the bright white glare of the gasoline lanterns in the tents.

Thoth stirred. "Wada . . ." he rumbled weakly. "Wada . . ."

Diana sprang to his side, held a cup to his lips. "Shall I try to feed him?"

"Yes," said Jesse. He'd had the cook prepare a kettle of thin gruel for the ape.

She sat by the cot, fed him with a spoon. Thoth swallowed weakly but greedily.

A hunting leopard screamed from the dense black jungle. Then an elephant squealed and there was the crash of trampling brush growing fainter and fainter.

Jesse was suddenly conscious of the myriad night noises—the hum and whine of millions of insects, the croaking frogs.

He picked up the dainty sacrificial knife from the table top, began to scour it.

"Ah it's beautiful!" Diana burst out. "Beautiful!"

Most of the corrosion had been stripped from the hammered blade so that it was a dappled green and copper. The gold figurine of the dancing girl that served for a pommel had been worn to a soft satiny finish by the grip of many hands. The eyes were formed by green stones, emeralds possibly. The hair enameled black.

"The golden girl!" Diana said in rapture.

Jesse turned it over and over in his hands. "I wish to hell we knew where Thoth found it." His hard blue eyes were aglitter. He laid it gently on the table.

"The Carthaginians were through here a couple of thousand years back. A man by the name of Hanno is supposed to have planted colonies along the West coast of Africa . . ."

"You—you think this to be Carthaginian?"

"Hell," said Jesse, "I couldn't tell it, if it was. I'm no archaeologist. But I've heard the story."

Diana stroked the satiny yellow body of the golden girl with her finger tips. "It is the mystery, like the aggry beads. *N'est-ce pas?*"

"What the hell are the aggry beads?"

"Have you not seen them? They are of two kinds, variegated and plain. Some are blue or green or yellow or red. Some consist of different colored strata. And their workmanship is of such a style that it can not be imitated.

"The natives have had them always it seems. They value them very highly. The only explanation for them is that they were introduced by Phoenician or Carthaginian traders. Beads of a similarity are said to have been found in the ancient tombs at Thebes . . ." She broke off as she realized that Jesse was no longer listening.

"Be quiet!" he said suddenly.

"What is it?"

"Be quiet!"

At first they could hear nothing above the shrill jungle orchestration. Then a vagrant eddy of the humid air brought them the distant sound of chanting.

"Umm—umm—umm—umm!"

"It's a safari!" Diana burst out. "But who would be marching at this hour?"

Jesse's visage was grim. The chant of marching men was growing louder. The blacks around the fire had sprung to their feet. They stood like half glimpsed ebony statues—listening.

"Schemmerhorn!" said Jesse and swept the knife from the table, returned it to the box. "The Dutchman is the only other white man in the neighborhood. He must have trailed us!"

As he spoke he was buckling his revolver about his lean middle. Then he went to the entrance, pulled the mosquito netting aside and stood peering off toward the rising sound of voices .

In a minute he caught sight of the flicker of torches like a procession of fireflies.

It was a scene straight from the inferno. The bobbing line of torches snaking through the dripping fantastic foliage. The smoky red glare on black hides. The heated, oppressively moist atmosphere.

Jesse, naked to the waist with the sweat streaming down his lean bronze torso, stood in the flap and watched the head of the safari crawl into the clearing.

Four stalwart blacks were bearing a tipoye on their shoulders in which the huge figure of Schemmerhorn sprawled like a recumbent Buddha.

The Dutchman caught sight of Jesse, waved his sun helmet. He roared at his porters to halt, climbed heavily from the litter.

Jesse's hand dropped to the butt of his revolver, but he didn't draw it.

Schemmerhorn was profanely bidding his men make camp across the clearing. Then he swung around, came towards Jesse with the ponderous but silently agile stride of a wild elephant. Jesse heard Diana draw a sharp frightened breath.

There was a great beaming smile on the Dutchman's moon face, but it didn't reach to his little cold gray eyes.

"*Ach!* Mine friend," he called out. "I haff had the devil's own time catching up mit you."

Jesse didn't move aside from the entrance and Schemmerhorn perforce came to a stop.

The smile didn't leave the Hollander's face. He was dressed in wrinkled pajamas, *velschoen* and a soiled white topee. An English Webley revolver was belted about his thick waist.

"No hard feelings, mine friend. Business

iss business. Und I haff an offer . . ."

"Offer for what?"

Schemmerhorn rubbed his bull-like neck with a stubby forefinger.

"Before ve discuss that, *mijnheer,* in vat shape iss the baboon?"

Jesse concealed his astonishment with an effort. How the devil had Schemmerhorn learned about Thoth already?

A laugh rumbled up from the Dutchman's chest. "You vonder, *ja?* I haff had you trailed und vatched ever since you left the plantation. *Ach,* mine friend, I knew the best vay to send you off like a shot after the ape was to threaten you not to try it. I am a judge of men." And he slapped his thigh and roared. But his eyes were as coldly shrewd as ever.

Jesse's lips thinned. Then with a shrug he stood aside.

"Come in," he said dryly. "But you're wasting your time."

VI

SO THIS iss the ape that talks," said Schemmerhorn. Giving Diana brief nod as he had marched past her straight to Thoth's side. Now he stood over the drill, staring down at him curiously. "Can you persuade him to say somethings?"

Thoth's beady eyes met the Dutchman's pale gray ones and a growl rumbled weakly from his chest. Instinctively the ape seemed to have conceived a hatred for Schemmerhorn.

"There's your answer," said Jesse. "He'll talk if he feels like it."

"I can make him talk!"

"You'll keep your hands off him."

Schemmerhorn's eyes narrowed, but the smile never left his moon face. "He's veak. He iss in bad shape, dot von." He swung around facing Jesse and Diana. The tent seemed suddenly cramped with his great bulk.

Diana's shirt was open at the throat exposing the vale between her breasts. She was wearing shorts, and her legs looked long and slim and brown. Schemmerhorn fastened gray eyes upon her. The girl reddened.

Jesse began to get mad. "You've seen him . . ."

"*Ja,*" he interrupted. "He iss in worse shape than I suspected, but I am a gambler. I vill giff you a thousand pounds for him just as he iss."

"Nothing doing."

Two thousand pounds und I do not even know if he talks."

"He's not for sale."

The Hollander pulled out a handkerchief, dabbed at his great round face.

"There iss much danger that he vill die on your hands und you vill have nothings to show your your trouble. But I vill giff you two thousand pounds for a half share. Den if he dies you vill still be protected."

In pungent French, Diana told him that they didn't intend to sell Thoth, but if they did that he, Schemmerhorn, would never be the purchaser.

Schemmerhorn only grinned. "I am a tenacious man. I vait."

Jesse said, "You're wasting your time."

"Who knows vat tomorrow will bring. I vait." The Dutchman moved with surprising lightness in one so heavy towards the entrance. With one hand on the netting, he paused. "You may be glad to throw in vith me yet. If you change your mind I vill be handy." Then with an affable chuckle he was gone.

Jesse stared after him, cursing softly. What the hell was Schemmerhorn up to? There there was one thing that Jesse was sure of though. He had sadly underestimated the Dutchman's cunning. He wished Thoth was strong enough to be moved.

He turned back to the frightened girl and said: "I'm sleeping in here with Thoth."

"Oh, Jesse," she said. "You can not let him get Thoth. You can not."

"I don't intend to," he rejoined dryly.

The next morning, Thoth was visibly improved. Jesse fed him, talking to him all the time. The ape's eyes followed him about the tent. And there was a peculiar puzzled light in their depths.

He couldn't make the white man out. In a vague uncertain way it was dawning on Thoth that Jesse had saved his life, and he couldn't understand why. He was grateful yet suspicious. He feared him, yet he felt a strange bond of affection for him.

The white She didn't affect him like that. He wasn't afraid of the white She, but neither did she arouse any affection in him.

The white She came in just then rubbing her eyes sleepily. It occurred to Thoth that she must cover herself with those strange skins because she was ashamed of her hairlessness.

Jesse was drinking a cup of coffee. He asked: "Have you eaten?"

"Yes. Sule brought my breakfast to the tent."

"Good. Keep your eye out front for Schemmerhorn. I want to question Thoth about the knife. And I don't want the Dutchman to see it."

"One minute," she said going to Thoth. "How are you this morning, my old one? Better—non?" Her voice was warm, vital, and there was a twinkle in her green eyes.

Thoth stared at her unblinkingly.

She put her hand out and scratched him behind the ear. The drill stiffened but allowed her hand to remain.

"That's a good way to lose an arm," observed Jesse dryly.

"Not Thoth. He is *evolue.*"

"Civilized, hell," said Jesse. "Because he can talk, it doesn't mean that he's tame. Beside he's at an age when all the apes turn vicious."

The girl took her hand away, and the drill relaxed. "I think I've offended his dignity. He's terribly dignified." She went to the flap and glanced out.

"Any sign of Schemmerhorn?" Jesse asked.

"He must still be asleep."

"Keep your eye on his camp anyway while I question Thoth." Jesse took the sacrificial knife from the box and held it up. "Knife. Knife."

The ape stared at the dagger with bright, intelligent eyes. "Knife," he rumbled in that eerie inhuman voice. "Me . . . knife."

"That's right. It's your knife. Thoth's knife. We know that. But we want to know where you found it? Where get knife?"

Thoth peered at him silently, expectantly.

Jesse frowned, trying to find words that would convey his meaning to the drill. At length he resorted to pantomime. He hid the knife under the table. Then he sniffed all around the tent. When he found it, he gave loud cries of joy and picked the knife up and fondled it eagerly. Thoth continued to stare at him blankly.

"You should have been an actor," Diana said with a giggle.

Jesse shot her a furious glance. "You get knife," he addressed Thoth again. "Thoth get knife."

"Me . . . get," the ape replied hoarsely. "Where?"

Thoth cocked his head and stared at him expectantly. Obviously the word meant nothing to him.

Jesse swore under his breath. After an hour he was sweating profusely and no nearer learning where the drill had found the gold sacrificial dagger.

It began to look like a hopeless task.

"Here comes Schemmerhorn," Diana broke in. "He has just left his tent."

Jesse put the knife away, wiped the sweat off his face. "We'll try again later."

BUT it was two days later before Thoth began to understand what Jesse wanted to know. And even then the ape lacked the vocabulary to explain where he had picked up the knife.

Jesse was amazed at the complicated idea patterns that lie behind even the simplest words. It was like the old proverb: "For want of a nail the shoe was lost . . ."

Nevertheless, by means of grunts, gestures and a sprinkling of English words, Thoth had managed to convey the vague impression that he had picked up the knife some place back in the Crystal Mountains.

The drill had improved miraculously the last two days, but Jesse's worries hadn't been lessened. For one thing he'd noticed a distinct slacking of discipline among his porters.

There was nothing he could put his finger on, no act for which he could single out the culprit and make an example of him.

No. It was much more subtle than that. The porters were slower to obey. They did their work more sloppily. There was a tendency to argue over orders.

It spelled trouble in a big way unless it was nipped in the bud.

Jesse, in pajamas and mosquito boots, was in the tent turning the problem over in his mind as he dressed Thoth's wounds.

The ape appeared strong enough to travel. If he could get him back to the plantation before trouble broke out . . .

But a doubt gnawed at Jesse's brain. His men had been fraternizing with Schemmerhorn's blacks. Fidele, his ex-gunboy, had been among them constantly. Fidele

was downright impudent. There was a cockiness about the gunboy that tipped Schemmerhorn's hand.

Jesse never doubted that Schemmerhorn was at the bottom of it all. But the Dutchman had been affable, even jovial. He reminded Jesse of a fat spider, spinning, spinning a tangled web about him.

He finished with Thoth's dressing, washed his hands, his back to the entrance. A slight darkening of the light, made him swing around.

Fidele stood blocking the entrance, staring in at Thoth.

The black was dressed in a swallow tail morning coat and a breechclout. Tribal scars gave his thick lipped visage a ferocious scowl.

"What d'you want?" Jesse asked shortly.

"Ape—him good shape?"

Jesse could feel his temper getting out of hand. He advanced slowly on Fidele, his hard blue eyes narrowed.

"Who wants to know?"

"Big bwana." The black's tone was as insulting as he dared make it.

"You tell Schemmerhorn to come over and see for himself, if he wants to know. Don't you ever set foot in this tent again. Now get the hell out of here!"

But Fidele didn't budge. "Ape — him good shape?" he asked again.

Something burst in Jesse's brain. With a silent lunge, he grabbed Fidele, spun him around, kicked him through the mosquito netting.

It was a healthy boot that sent Fidele tumbling, enmeshed in the screening like a leopard in a net.

The black scrambled to his feet, threw off the mosquito netting. With a snarl, he reached for his knife.

Jesse stood spread legged in the tent's entrance, his hand resting on the pommel of his revolver. Fidele looked into his cold blue eyes and his fighting rage evaporated. Muttering sullenly to himself the black slunk off.

"Diana!" Jesse called.

"Yes." Her voice answered from the other tent.

"Come over here."

"Yes. At once." Her voice sounded breathless. There had been something in Jesse's tone that brooked no delay.

Jesse turned grimly back into the tent. Thoth, he saw with surprise, was sitting up, a snarl on his dog-like face.

"Me . . . kill!" the ape rumbled. "Kill! Kill! Black!"

Jesse was startled. It always startled him when he discovered afresh how clearly the drill was able to grasp a situation.

He and Diana had talked in front of him of course. They made no secret of their opinion of Schemmerhorn and Fidele. And Thoth was able to understand a great deal more than he could put into speech. But that the ape would actually side with them against Schemmerhorn's crew had never occurred to Jesse. A grin cracked his hard visage and he scratched Thoth behind the ears.

"Don't fret, old boy. If there's any killing to be done, I'll do it," and he slapped the revolver belted about his waist.

"What's this of killing?" Diana demanded in a frightened voice as she ran inside.

"Nothing, I hope." Jesse wheeled around to face her.

THE girl wore thin yellow cotton pajamas and mosquito boots and her black hair was streaming about her shoulders. A beading of perspiration dewed her upper lip and temples. Her cheeks were bloodless beneath her tan.

For a moment, she hesitated against the light, her slimly curved figure silhouetted through the sheer material. Then she dropped on a canvas stool, fluffed out her black hair with a weary gesture.

"What is it that you wanted?"

It was growing dusky in the tent. Jesse took the lantern from its hook, lit it before replying.

"I don't trust our boys. I think they've sold out to Schemmerhorn."

Diana's green eyes grew enormous.

"But—but I do not understand."

Jesse said impatiently: "His men can grab us. He can drag us off in the bush somewhere and murder us. Our boys'll stand by and do nothing. They've probably been coached to tell the authorities we wandered off and got lost.

"Hell, nobody'd suspect anything. Life's cheap in the jungle. And Schemmerhorn must have Thoth."

The gabble of the blacks preparing the

evening meal, drifted in to them. A dozen fires sent tenuous columns of smoke up from the clearing. They could even hear the kettles bubbling merrily.

Diana shook her head in disbelief. "I cannot think it!"

"Schemmerhorn's been waiting to see if Thoth would recover," Jesse retorted dryly. "That's the only reason he's held off this long . . ."

"We'll break camp tonight!" Diana burst out.

"That's exactly what we won't do. In the first place I don't think our porters would obey us. It would be the signal for Schemmerhorn to gather us in."

"But what *is* there to do?" she wailed.

"Thoth's in shape to travel. Tonight just as soon as the camp quiets down, we'll sneak out the rear of the tent and . . ."

"But what if we are watched?"

"We'll have to chance it. Thoth's nose and eyes are better than any black's. With him to warn us, we can slip past the guards.

"Schemmerhorn shouldn't discover our absence before daybreak. That'll give us an eight hour start and the plantation's only a day's march from here.

"And leave our equipment!" Diana's thrifty French soul was horrified at the sacrifice.

"Damn the equipment!"

Suddenly Thoth gave a low warning growl. The acuteness of the baboon's senses made him superior to any watchdog. Jesse swung towards the drill.

"What is it, Thoth? What's the trouble? Anybody coming?"

"Man . . ." Thoth growled hoarsely. "White—man." His ugly features screwed themselves hideously in the effort to mouth a new sound. "Kum. Kum. White—man!"

Jesse sprang to the flap and peered out. Darkness had rolled over the dripping green jungle like a curtain. The clearing was lit weirdly by the cook fires.

Jesse caught sight of Schemmerhorn striding ponderously for their tent. The flames turned his soiled white pajamas rosy, the same color as his beefy face. He looked like a big pink Buddha.

"What is it?" Diana whispered.

He gestured for her to be quiet. Fidele was walking one step to the rear of the Hollander, and an ominous silence had the blacks in thrall. He could see the whites of their eyes as they rolled them towards the tent.

"Looks like we're too late," said Jesse and loosed the revolver in its holster.

Diana chewed her lips, her nostrils flaring with fright. Thoth growled.

"Might as well turn the ape loose," muttered Jesse. He unbuckled the collar. But Thoth settled down on his stomach like a big watch dog and made no attempt at flight.

Suddenly Jesse snuffed the light. The tent was thrown into stygian darkness.

"That's far enough, Schemmerhorn," he called out. "I'll put a bullet through your belly if you come another step."

The Hollander paused with a muttered oath in Dutch. He strained his eyes peering into the blackened entrance.

"Dot iss foolishness," he called. He was still thirty or forty feet off. "You can not hold oudt in a tent. It vill stop no bullets."

"No, but you'd be just as apt to hit Thoth as one of us."

"*Ja.* Dot's right. I vouldn't have dot happen!" He chuckled loudly.

Suddenly, something struck the rear of the tent. There was the smell of cloth burning. Then the canvas burst into flames.

One of the blacks, Jesse realized, had slipped up behind and tossed a burning brand against the tent!

Diana gave a frightened scream. Thoth was on his feet hobbling for the entrance. Jesse's hard blue eyes narrowed.

"Damn you, Schemmerhorn," he yelled, and pulled the trigger twice.

VII

THE TWO explosions came so close together that they sounded like one.

Schemmerhorn went down with a crash. But the Dutchman carried so much beef, Jesse couldn't be sure whether his shots had been fatal or not.

"Come on!" he yelled at Diana and burst from the flaming tent. They circled away from the blacks who were on their feet gaping in disbelief. Thoth followed limping.

Schemmerhorn's voice burst into a furious roar behind them.

"Dumbheads! Cut them off from the trail! Spread out! Drive them ahead of you!"

The blacks were galvanized into action. They made a concerted rush to head the fleeing man and girl from the trail leading back to the plantation.

Jesse saw that the natives were ahead of them. He fired as he ran trying to open a lane. But they met his shots with a shower of sticks and spears. Suddenly his revolver clicked. It was empty. With a curse, he spun around.

"Back!" he commanded tersely. "The other side. Run!"

A black raised up abruptly in front of them. It was Fidele. Jesse hurled his empty revolver and missed.

Then Thoth sprang monkey-like straight for the negro's throat. His great jaws crunched together. Fidele went over, his scream choked off at its source, blood spurting from his severed jugular.

In a dozen steps they had reached the enveloping wall of jungle and plunged out of sight.

Jesse could hear shouts raised behind them, the angry bellowing of Schemmerhorn.

They were following a tortuous elephant trail that led directly away from the plantation. The blackness was impenetrable. He couldn't see Diana beside him.

Only the slap of her mosquito boots as she ran and the sob of breath in her throat told him that she was still there.

Thoth limped along, keeping up with them easily in the utter dark.

Twice Jesse paused, tried to cut off the trail at right angles so that they could circle back towards the plantation. But each time he was stopped by the impenetrable tangle. They were always forced to run deeper into the mountains.

The shouts grew fainter behind them but they hung on like the baying of hounds. Occasionally he caught the pin point flicker of a torch.

Schemmerhorn must have native trackers with him—men who could trail a bird through the air.

Damn that Dutchman! If only his shots had killed him, they would have stood a fair chance of getting back to the plantation. But as it stood, they were being driven like animals in the opposite direction, straight into the rugged Crystal Mountains!

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"Jesse!" Diana panted. "Mother of God, I cannot run another step!"

He paused supporting the winded girl with his arm. From behind them came the growing sounds of pursuit. He could feel Thoth brush against his pajama leg.

God, what chance did they have. An unarmed man and a girl, clad only in pajama and mosquito boots, and a wounded ape!

"Go!" Thoth growled nervously. "Go . . . .go!" and tugged at his flapping pajama jacket.

Jesse's fists were clenched. If they could only put enough distance between themselves and their pursuers, they might be able to circle back after daylight.

Half carrying the exhausted girl, he plunged ahead up the trail.

GRADUALLY it began to dawn on Jesse that Thoth was guiding them. Whenever they strayed from the trail, Thoth tugged at his jacket, growling: "Go —go."

Obviously the ape had some definite objective in mind. But Jesse couldn't guess what it might be. He had no idea where they were or even in what direction Thoth was leading them.

A pall of black clouds, shot with heat lightning, obscured the stars. The noise of pursuit was lost in the distance behind them. The only sounds were the night noises, the mutter of thunder.

They were lost—he and the girl and the ape—in the midst of a primeval world.

Just before dawn rain began to fall, a warm steady downpour that hissed on the leaves like the spray from a shower bath. They were high up in the mountains and the trail grew slippery and treacherous with mud. The sound of rushing water was everywhere.

Diana was on the verge of exhaustion. She struggled through the mud, holding to the tail of Jesse's pajama jacket, too tired to talk, too tired to do anything but plant one foot ahead of the other.

Day finally broke wet and gray, with no indication of where the sun was rising.

They halted on the crest of a divide. Jesse peered out over miles of steaming miasmic green jungle that cloaked valleys and mountainside.

There was no longer any doubt about it. They were hopelessly lost. Of the three of them only Thoth appeared to know where they were going.

Diana had sunk exhausted to a moss grown log. The girl's yellow pajamas were soaked and torn. They clung faithfully, revealing dejection in the very slump of her body. Her hair strung limply about her wan face, and she was covered with mud.

"Surely the rain has washed out our tracks," she said.

Jesse nodded. The baboon had squatted on his haunches watching them with a curious beady-eyed intentness.

Diana gave a tired little sigh. "Cannot we sleep then. I could not take another step."

Thoth cocked his head.

"Go," he rumbled. "Go . . . go." And rising to all fours, trotted down the opposite slope.

"Let him go," said Diana wearily. "I am too tired to care."

The rain had stopped, but the clouds were still scudding low across the sky hiding the sun, filming the mountains so that the truncated peaks seemed to be supporting the black sky line pillars.

"We're lost," said Jesse. "We'd better stick with Thoth. He seems to know where he's going at least." And he picked the girl up and started down the trail with her in his arms.

They ate that day what Thoth ate, watching him to see which fruits and tubers were edible. And they spent the night beneath an overhanging ledge of rock.

They were awakened by the sun striking in under the ledge. Jesse yawned and stretched, then he went out and climbed to the peak of a rise and surveyed the country.

It had changed. It was rugged and boulder strewn. The jungle was thinner, more scraggly. Then his eyes swept across the route they'd covered yesterday, and he stiffened.

Just breasting a hill in the distance was a thin line of tiny moving figures like ants!

Somehow Schemmerhorn's trackers had managed to ferret out their trail!

With a shout of alarm, he flung himself down the wet slope, crashing into trees, skidding into boulders and brought up panting before the ovrehanging ledge.

"Schemmerhorn!" he began. Then stopped with his mouth open.

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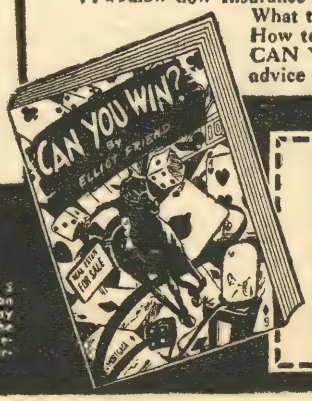

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There was no one there. The place was absolutely deserted.

Neither Thoth nor Diana was anywhere to be seen. Jesse's hard blue eyes narrowed. He cast about anxiously, found the girl's tracks in the mud, followed them toward the stream which flowed through the center of the valley.

A gleam of yellow among some bushes caught his eye. Then he heard the splash of water.

"Diana!"

"Yes. I am bathing, *mon vieux*." Her voice rose from beyond the clump of bushes.

"Get the hell out of there!" he shouted. "Schemmerhorn's only a few miles back!"

There was a muffled cry, and Diana jumped from the rivulet like Venus being born from the sea.

"Where's Thoth?" Jesse cried impatiently.

"He went off after food."

"Thoth!" Jesse called. "Thoth!"

A bark sounded behind him. He whirled about to find the ape dropping from the trees with an arm load of fruit.

"White man!" Jesse cried. "White man! Schemmerhorn, he come!"

A growl escaped Thoth's lips. He dropped the fruit and started off at a fast trot up the slope, grunting, "Go—go!" explosively.

"Wait for me!" Diana wailed, struggling into her mosquito boots. "Wait for me."

It would have been funny but Jesse's sense of humor had deserted him. Shouting at Diana to hurry, he plunged after Thoth.

ANOTHER hour's travel brought them to a deep gorge, up which the drill turned. All at once, Thoth veered towards a line of bluffs, halted before the mouth of a cavern. He sniffed warily at the entrance. Then, seemingly satisfied, he disappeared inside.

Jesse and Diana regarded each other soberly.

"What is it? A den?" the girl asked.

Jesse shook his head. "I don't know."

Thoth's ugly black muzzle appeared in the opening. "Go!" he barked at them. "Go!"

"Come on," said Jesse. "He wants us to follow him."

The mouth of the cavern was wide and low. They had to stoop to enter, but after a few steps the roof heightened. They found themselves in a wide cavern.

Light from the opening spread fanwise through the cool dank gloom. Jesse could see massive stalactites like tusks depending from the ceiling toward stumpy stalagmites below. It gave him the eerie feeling of walking into the mouth of some giant prehistoric fish.

The throat of the cavern was lost in blackness, but the ape never paused.

Jesse put his hand on Thoth's grizzled ruff. Diana clutched the tail of Jesse's pajama jacket. And so the ape and the man and the girl vanished into the depths of the mountain.

After more than two hours, a pale glow ahead showed them that they were reaching the opposite end of the cavern. The glow strengthened. Then a spot of daylight appeared.

They emerged blinking from the passage and stood transfixed.

Jesse rubbed his eyes. Diana murmured: "Beautiful!" But the word sounded pale and uninspired beside the reality that had burst on their startled eyes.

A rift in the clouds overhead had allowed the brilliant equatorial sunlight to pour through. They saw a long valley that was a riot of vivid green jungle. Towering purple and red walls of rock hemmed them in on every hand. They were close to the thin jeweled ribbon of a waterfall that dropped sheer for hundreds of feet.

"Look!" Diana burst out. "What is it that stands there?"

Jesse's eyes followed the direction of her finger. At first he could distinguish nothing except the tangle of vegetation below them. Then he made out a vague gray shape.

It looked like a baby elephant. But then he realized the ears were too large. The huge gray flaps almost brushed the ground. And the tusks were too well developed.

"Pygmy elephants!" he said in an excited voice.

Something disturbed them. Whether the elephants were warned by their scent or not he never knew, but a shrill trumpeting blasted among the herd, and silent as puffs of gray smoke they drifted into the jungle.

Thoth picked his way down the talus

at the base of the cliff, Jesse and Diana following him. They went gingerly over the sharp stones because their soft mosquito boots were in shreds. When they reached the bottom, they plunged into a trail that tunneled straight through the jungle.

They had gone scarcely a hundred yards, when Jesse gave a shout of surprise.

"What is it?"

"This is a road," he said. "We're traveling on a road!"

Diana caught her breath. Big weathered paving stones like the Roman roads led straight away through the jungle before them. Here and there roots had prized the blocks from their sockets, tumbled them on end. Debris and litter covered most of it. But the center had been kept clear by the ceaseless passage of wild things.

"What does it mean?" Diana whispered, her green eyes enormous. She looked like a waif in the tattered yellow pajamas.

"Mean?" Jesse was bursting with excitement. "It means that this must be where Thoth found the knife." He was suddenly in a fever to see where the road led. "Come on! Hurry!" And he tugged impatiently at Diana's arm.

THE road ran on through the jungle following the curve of the canyon. It was like walking through a black and green tunnel, it's leafy roof supported by the incredibly ancient tree boles.

Not far off Jesse heard a leopard cough. Thoth bristled and growled. A band of Colobus monkeys fled suddenly across their path, shrieking in terror. Parrots rose in squawking flocks from the trees.

Then Jesse caught sight of two crumbling piles of masonry that rose up suddenly on either side of the road like watch towers. They were swathed in creepers, half hidden by the jungle. But even so they obviously had been the work of man.

"Looks like it might have been a gate," said Jesse in a tight voice.

"A gate to what?"

"To a city!"

"But I see only jungle."

Instead of answering, Jesse drew her between the crumbling towers. Narrow and tortuous, the avenue stretched before them, running between high walls of rubble like a railway cut. But here and there build-

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ings still stood, recognizable despite the heavy growth that blanketed everything.

Diana gasped, her eyes growing rounder and rounder.

"Who do you think built it?" she breathed. "Where have they gone?"

Jesse shook his head.

The ape squatted on his haunches and regarded Jesse and Diana curiously. He couldn't comprehend their excitement, and he was anxious to get to the caves and the safety of the herd.

Man was a queer animal, Thoth thought. Bloodthirsty, dangerous, and yet soft and easily killed. It was a puzzle that Thoth made no attempt to solve.

Besides, he was worried about how the other baboons would accept the white man and his She.

Jesse said abruptly, "If we could get to the top of that building we could take a look around."

"Let us try it," begged Diana in an eager voice.

They approached the towering mass of stone, pulled themselves up by means of creepers and vines, finding footholes in the crumbling masonry.

The tower was high, and they were winded before they reached the small stone platform on top.

Jungle lay thick over the city beneath them, but they could catch gleams of alabaster through the branches, half seen glimpses of balcony hung buildings. The city seemed to fill this end of the canyon from purple wall to purple wall. Off in the distance, was a patch of shimmering blue that must be a lake.

"Eden!" Diana breathed. "I could stay here forever!"

The words had scarcely left her mouth when a shot reverberated from up the canyon!

Jesse's hand closed on Diana's shoulder with a strength that made her wince.

The flat crack of the rifle had come from the direction of the cave through which they'd reached the valley.

"Eden," he repeated dryly. "And there's the snake!"

"Schemmerhorn?"

"Of course it's Schemmerhorn! Who else could it be?"

Thoth set up an excited frenzied barking from the street below. Then he switched to English, growling: "Go! . . . Go! . . . Go!" furiously.

Jesse nodded at the ape. "Better follow his lead. We don't want to be caught up here in any event!"

Grimly he began to help Diana down the side of the tower.

VIII

"IF THERE'S no way out of this damned valley but that cave, we're in a hell of a spot," Jesse said. He and the girl were trotting behind Thoth through the deserted streets. "If Schemmerhorn posts a guard at the entrance, we'll be trapped!"

Diana flashed him a frightened glance. She bit her lip.

They were almost naked, without weapons of any sort. They'd fall an easy prey to Schemmerhorn.

"Listen!" said Jesse harshly.

The girl paused, mouth open. From up ahead they could hear the barking and chattering of a colony of baboons.

"It's Thoth's tribe," said Jesse. "That's where he's been taking us!"

Diana blanched. "But they will tear us to bits!"

"I don't know." Jesse sounded doubtful. "Thoth may be able to protect us. If we can hide among the baboons, we'll be safe temporarily. Nobody but a fool would attack a band of those brutes!"

Thoth ran back to them, commenced tugging at Jesse's sleeve, barking at them.

"He wants us to come with him," said Jesse. Then dryly: "What the hell have we got to lose?"

He started off again with the ape, pulling Diana along. They burst suddenly from the dense vegetation into a clear strip along the foot of the purple bluff.

Jesse whistled softly.

The cliff was pockmarked with caves, and everywhere there were baboons. Thousands of them, it looked like. Big grizzled fighters, young males, babies and mothers. They swarmed through the caverns like fleas.

"The kraal of apes!" Jesse burst out.

A sudden excited barking broke out as the sentries caught sight of them. Pandemonium broke loose from the rocks.

Diana snatched Jesse's hand, clung to it

timorously. It looked like the apes were going to sweep over them in a furious brown tidal wave.

Then Thoth barked a command.

The pandemonium subsided to an ugly muttering. Jesse had the tense feeling that they were on trial. He could read hate and suspicion in the snarling visages of the dog-like drills.

"Man!" their expression said. "Man! Kill—kill—kill!"

They had never received anything but death at the hands of the man. The baboon is considered a dangerous nuisance. From the Cape to Cairo he is protected nowhere. Only his intelligence and strength have preserved him from extinction. Jesse, knowing this, could feel a cold gnawing at the pit of his stomach.

Thoth barked again. This time there were sounds mixed in his speech that vaguely resembled English words.

At once, a dozen young males with bows slung to their shoulders, separated themsleves from the herd. They trotted up to Thoth, drew themselves up in a line beside him facing the cliffs.

The action was so like a platoon of soldiers that Diana gasped and Jesse couldn't believe his eyes. It's one thing to know baboons employ tactics of offense and defense. It's another to actually watch it being done.

The drills unslung their bows, fitted arrows. Low cries of fright broke out.

Thoth paraded up and down, roaring and barking. He seemed to be in a fury. There was something so pompous and human and deadly in that strut like a dictator, like Mussolini dominating an Italian crowd, that Jesse could feel shiver after shiver run up his spine.

"I am Thoth!" the drill's very attitude proclaimed. "I led you to this haven! I gave you the bow! Who dares question what I do?"

Then a grizzled old man baboon stalked towards them stiff-legged. Under the watchful eyes of the guards, he sniffed Jesse appraisingly, then Diana, then he stalked back muttering to himself.

As if it had been a signal, the baboons approached filing past the near naked people, sniffing suspiciously at their tattered garments. When the last ape had satisfied

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his curiosity, Thoth growled "Go," at Jesse and started up the face of the cliff.

Jesse drew an uneven breath. He was sick with relief. "We seem to have been accepted," he remarked in an uncertain voice.

Diana was too weak to do anything but nod as they scrambled up the ledges after Thoth.

The baboons' animosity had vanished. They crowded about Jesse and Diana fingering their strange garments, chattering, barking. They were like excited children.

"These aren't natural caves!" Jesse said suddenly. "They're tombs!"

Diana's eyes widened. "For the people of the city below!"

He nodded. Thoth, he saw, had paused before the mouth of one of the shallow caverns. Suddenly a scrawny long-tailed baby baboon hurled himself onto Diana.

"Look, Jesse, look, it's little Kee!" the girl cried, and gathering the baby baboon in her arms, hugged him ecstatically.

Little Kee grabed a lock of her hair and yanked.

"Why you little monster!" said Diana.

Kee wriggled out of her arms and scampered away chuckling.

Jesse grinned. He turned, stared down on the sea of jungle beneath him.

All at once, the sentries set up frenzied barking! Jesse stiffened. Then he swept Diana back out of sight into the mouth of the tomb. Schemmerhorn had appeared at the edge of the jungle.

The Hollander was still in wrinkled, soiled white pajamas, topee and *velschoen*. But his left shoulder was swathed in bandages. His blacks were grouped silently behind him.

For a moment, he stood in the open, staring up at the baboonery. Then without a sound, he turned and disappeared again in the jungle.

"Of a truth," said Diana with a nervous giggle, "I am starving for meat."

"Raw?"

"Ugh!" the girl shivered. "Almost I could eat it raw."

Jesse and Diana were squatting anxiously on the dry stone floor of Thoth's den waiting for night. Three days had elapsed. Three days during which they had lain hidden in the tombs. Only after dark, had they dared venture forth in search of food. And even that was dangerous because Schemmerhorn kept a close watch on the baboons.

Something splattered viciously against the face of the cliff! Then after a moment the sound of the shot reached them. Shrill frightened cries broke out among the baboons as they scrambled for cover.

Jesse tensed and swore.

A quarter of a mile away, Schemmerhorn was ensconsed on top of a ruined tower take pot shots at the apes with the aid of telescopic sights. He'd already killed seven or eight of the drills, and the colony was wild with panic.

Yesterday, in a frightened body the baboons had trooped off for the passage through the mountain, intending to flee the valley. But the Hollander had thrown up a barricade across the mouth of the cavern and erected his base camp there. The apes had run into a regular fusillade.

They were trapped — trapped as effectively in the valley as if they'd been shut up in a dungeon.

From below Jesse could hear the steady ringing blows of axes. Schemmerhorn's crew were clearing away the jungle from the ruins. Huge bonfires crackled, sent up roaring columns of smoke and sparks.

The Dutchman seemed obsessed with the idea of buried treasure. It added to Jesse's fury, because he was afraid Schemmerhorn might actually find something.

"If I only had a rifle!" he groaned.

A baboon screamed abruptly! It was an eerie human cry like a child in pain. Then the flat report of Schemmerhorn's rifle drifted up to them. They could hear the ape's body strike the base of the cliff with a dull thud.

Jesse cursed the Dutchman, his hard blue eyes bleak.

Diana asked: "Could you not make the bow?"

He regarded her with a frown.

"In time. But the wood must be seasoned first and only certain woods will do. You need a strong light string. Feathers and tips for the arrows and thread and glue to fasten the feathers. Tools to shape . . ."

Diana threw up her hands in dismay. "Enough! Enough!"

At mention of bows, Thoth picked up his ears. The drill was stretched out doglike in the mouth of the tomb keeping a

worried, frightened eye on the work going on amid the ruins. Every time Schemmerhorn's rifle cracked, he flinched as if stung by a whip.

Now he wheeled around, trotted back to Jesse and Diana. "Make?" he rumbled. "Make?"

"What is it that he desires?" Diana asked.

Jesse scratched the sandy bristles furring his lean jaw. "I think he wants to know what's the meaning of 'make'."

"Make?" repeated the grizzled drill and cocked his ugly dog-like head expectantly.

"Why," explained Jesse in a dubious voice, "it means to *make* something—like a bow."

"Show him," suggested Diana.

Jesse's eyes lit on a green bough that Little Kee had dragged in to play with. "Me make bow," he told Thoth. "Bow. Me make. Watch."

HE STRIPPED the leaves and twigs from the branch. Then he tore a long streamer from his pajama leg, twisted it into a cord and strung the limb like a bow.

"Bow," he said, holding out the wretched imitation for Thoth's inspection. "Make. Me make. I make bow. See?"

The ape's eyes were snapping with excitement. He took the toy in his powerful hands, pulled the string and released it.

"Make," he muttered over and over again. "Make. Make." Then he gave Jesse a peculiar intent stare. "Black man make bow?"

"Yes. The blacks make their bows."

The huge grizzled drill scratched his head and pondered this miracle. Bows were made! They didn't just happen!

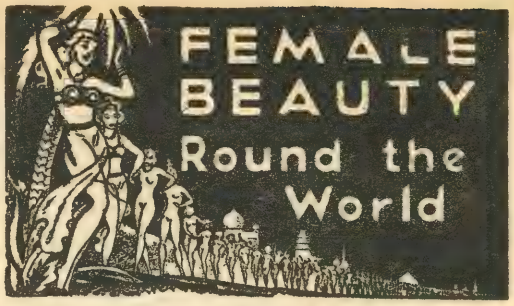
It opened an entirely new realm of thought. A tremendous thought. A thought that grew and grew until he felt as if it must burst his skull.

Diana said:

"Some of the apes have bows. Could not they attack Schemmerhorn's men. Inaugurate a reign of terror like that which prevailed on my plantation before you came?"

Jesse rubbed his beard with the back of his hand.

"The apes haven't many arrows left," he



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said half to himself. "They stole them from the pygmies, but since they've migrated to this valley, they've not been able to get replacements . . ."

Schemmerhorn's rifle cracked again. In the silence that followed, the ringing blows of the axes sounded louder. Then there was a tremendous prolonged crash as some forest giant toppled to earth.

Thoth twitched nervously. "Kill!" he rumbled in that inhuman rasp. "Kill. Me kill blacks!"

Jesse wiped the sweat off his forehead with his ragged sleeve.

"Yes," he said to the ape. "Yes, you kill blacks. Take tribe. Take apes. Kill black with bows and arrows!"

"Gun!" Thoth growled. "Gun . . . kill!"

It dawned on Jesse that Thoth was trying to tell him that the baboons were afraid to attack in the face of Schemmerhorn's rifle.

He chewed his lip, then struck by a thought, said:

"Stay in trees. Kill from trees. Hide in trees. Gun no see ape; no kill ape!"

He peered through the gathering dusk at Thoth, but the drill gave no indication that he understood.

Jesse began again. He went over and over it, changing the words, varying the simple sentence structure.

The axes fell silent below them. Schemmerhorn's rifle ceased to speak as the light grew too poor to shoot by. Darkness slowly filled the valley from rim to rim. The tomb was black as tar.

Still Jesse talked, gestured, trying to impress on Thoth that the drills must stay out of sight and ambush the blacks, fire on them from cover. Under no circumstances were they to allow themselves to be seen.

A short bark from Thoth interrupted him.

"Sun—he kum. Kill blacks!" Thoth's voice was a growl.

The baboon colony had quieted down for the night, but the jungle was awakening. A steadily rising cacophony of growls, chirps, screams, ascended to the tombs.

Jesse felt Diana slide her small warm hand into his, gripping his fingers convulsively.

"Oh, Jesse, can they do it?" For the first time there was a note of hope in her voice.

Jesse's chuckle sounded grim in the dark. "With a little help," he said drily. "And I rather imagine Schemmerhorn's own men will give us that!"

IX

GAUNT and bearded, Jesse Quinn lay flat along a thick limb twenty feet above the old road. The pale gray-green dawn was just filtering through the jungle. The air was full of the squawking unmusical cries of African birds. He heard a gorilla grunt and move off.

As the sun climbed above the mountains, heat but very little light penetrated the dense growth. It was dim and moist beneath the roof of leaves.

After a while, the faint shuffle of bare feet reached his ears, and he stiffened, turning his eyes up the old road. A column of blacks came into sight around a curve. They were strung out in single file, carrying axes and spades.

It was Schemmerhorn's crew going to work clearing away the jungle from the ruins. Jesse lay still as death as they straggled past beneath him.

He could scarcely repress a grunt of satisfaction as he took note of their expressions, sullen, frightened! No singing or talk arose from the blacks. They were ripe for panic!

The Hollander brought up the rear. He strode along in his dirty pajamas and battered topee, a scowl on his round red face. His small faded gray eyes jerked about, ceaselessly probing the jungle. And his rifle, a Mauser equipped with a hunting scope, was levelled.

For a moment Jesse thought that he had been seen. His stomach knotted. He could feel his heart flutter in his throat.

But Schemmerhorn never paused. He came on, passing beneath the limb with his ponderous, but strangely quiet stride.

Jesse let his breath escape with an inaudible sigh.

The clearing where the blacks were at work was no more than a hundred yards beyond Jesse's tree. In a minute, Schemmerhorn's bull-like voice was raised in command as he drove the blacks to work. The sound of axes stilled the rest of the jungle.

Sweat flies began to collect around

Jesse's unprotected head. He brushed them away, straining to listen. He heard a faint twang . . .

A shrill scream of pain and fright burst from the clearing! The axe blows stopped. Jesse's heart stopped.

Then the silence was broken by a terrified babble of voices.

"Gotverdomme!" Schemmerhorn roared. "Vhere did that come from?"

"Bwana, Bwana. It is the demon of the valley!"

The natives' voices drowned out Schemmerhorn. Jesse could distinguish only a word here and there, but enough to tell him the blacks were ready to bolt.

One of the drills shooting from the foliage, must have struck a black with a poisoned arrow. There was a second scream as another arrow lanced into their midst.

A horrified silence gripped them.

Jesse suddenly raised up on the limb, uttered a low pitched wailing cry.

"Kill the white man! Escape while there is still time!" he chanted in an ominous voice.

Without waiting to hear the result of his words, he dropped to the ground, sprinted up the old road towards the head of the valley like a lean ragged scarecrow.

Jesse had traced out every foot of his retreat and knew exactly where he was going. Surprise would give him the moments needed to make good his escape. Surprise and the fact that it would be almost impossible to tell where his voice had come from in that blanketing jungle.

He raced headlong around the curve of the old road. He could hear frightened cries break out behind him. Schemmerhorn was cursing in Dutch.

Gasping for breath, he spotted the break in the foliage, dived into a dim game trail that twisted through the undergrowth at right angles to the old road. He reached the second tree that he had singled out previously, swarmed up in its branches.

The excited frightened babble behind him was not so distinct now.

Suddenly there was a shot!

The flat "crack" was followed by a second explosion, then a thud. What was Schemmerhorn shooting at? Jesse glanced wildly around for the baboons, but there

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was no sign of them anywhere. They were keeping out of sight in the jungle as only a wild thing can.

Then the first of the blacks ran past. They were in the grip of a superstitious terror, fleeing blindly for the head of the valley and escape.

Jesse saw one of them stumble and sprawl to his face. A feathered shaft protruded from his naked black shoulder!

The apes were on the job!

Jesse gave another low, wailing cry, then chanted: "Kill the white man! Kill the white man!"

Immediately he dropped from his perch, ran bent-over along the twisting game trail directly away from the old road. He kept on without looking back until he fetched up against the base of the cliff.

Another trail paralleled the bluffs, and Jesse turned up it. He slowed to a trot, getting back his wind in sobbing gasps.

As he neared the head of the valley he moved slower and slower. The apes would be following up the fleeing blacks, shooting only as they got a chance to do so without being seen.

The heat was oppressive. Sweat rolled down his gaunt brown torso in streams. Lord, what he wouldn't give for a rifle. He could have picked Schemmerhorn off a dozen times.

Would the blacks turn on the Hollander? He doubted it. They seemed more afraid of Schemmerhorn than any demon. All at once Jesse halted, and slid in behind some bushes.

The mouth of the passage lay just ahead. Schemmerhorn and his men had reached it before him.

The Dutchman was rallying the frightened blacks behind the breastwork. There were no signs of the drills. They must be hanging well back in the jungle.

Jesse studied the scene with narrowed, thoughtful eyes.

The entrance to the cavern was set back in a shallow *cul de sac*. It was across this *cul de sac* that Schemmerhorn had thrown up his breastwork.

THE sides of the valley sloped steeply upward like an immense amphitheatre for hundreds of feet until it met the sheer unscaleable rimrock. If the apes could scramble up that abrupt slope, they could roll stones down on Schemmerhorn. His position would be untenable.

Jesse slipped back into the jungle, called softly: "Thoth! Thoth!"

A low answering bark came from the dense foliage overhead. Then the huge grizzled drill dropped at Jesse's feet.

"Get apes!" Jesse said. "Get apes. Come. Follow me. Come with me."

Thoth blinked at him curiously, then set up a low barking. A dozen of the powerful young males materialized from the jungle.

"Come," Jesse said again, and started for the slope, where a spur would hide them from Schemmerhorn.

The slope was almost straight up and down, the footing of weathered rock and dirt insecure. Jesse swore under his breath as he inched his way up the treacherous mass. He dug his nails into the stone until his fingertips were bleeding, clung insecurely to shrubs and creepers.

When he looked down he could see the dense green ocean of jungle beneath him. He felt like a fly clinging to the side of a building.

When they reached the base of the rim rock, hundreds of feet above the lush green floor of the canyon, they began to work their way forward until they hung above the *cul de sac*.

Schemmerhorn's men were huddled behind the breastwork directly beneath them. They were watching the silent wall of jungle. None of them looked up.

Jesse eyed the tiny figures of the blacks, curiously fore-shortened by his angle of vision. They were working at the fortification like ants. Schemmerhorn was striding back and forth, driving them to greater efforts.

Then he saw how the Dutchman had succeeded in turning back their panic stricken flight.

The mouth of the passage had been sealed with stone, and four of Schemmerhorn's Fulahs squatted on their heels in front of it, guarding it with rifles. The blacks, their avenue of escape blocked, had been forced to turn and defend themselves against the infuriated drills.

Jesse worked loose a small boulder, sent it rolling down the slope. It gathered momentum, bounced, plunged forty feet through the air in one bound. He dislodged

another and another, gesturing for the apes to follow his example.

In moments a dozen or more stones were thundering directly down on Schemmerhorn's men.

The Hollander rocked back on his heels, craning his neck upward in alarm. Then he gave a shout, slung his rifle to his shoulder.

Suddenly Jesse yelled: "Stop!" He stared in horror down the slope.

A small avalanche was being kicked up by the plunging boulders. Dust spurted from the mountainside. There was a low ominous grinding. The whole slope seemed to be on the move. The grinding became a thunderous sustained roar!

Jesse saw Schemmerhorn fling down his rifle and dash for the breastwork. Rocks began to rain down around him. He cast a terrified glance upward. Jesse could see that his mouth was open, but no sound was audible above the hellish thunder of the avalanche.

He reached the fortification.

The first thin wave of earth and stone swept his feet out from under him. Then the crest rolled over him.

"Back!" Jesse yelled at the drills. "Back!"

He could feel the earth and stone sucking from beneath his feet. Slipping and sliding he began to flounder down the treacherous slope at an angle away from the landslide.

The dull roar of the avalanche was a steady pressure against his ear drums. It swept into the *cul de sac,* filled it with tons and tons of rubble, washed up the opposite slope.

Not one of the blacks had escaped.

Then it was over almost as soon as it started.

A frozen silence gripped the valley. The complete, the utter absence of sound left Jesse stunned. He looked at the raw gash left by the landslide and said: "Lord."

Jesse and the frightened drills reached the canyon floor, slipping, panting. For a tense moment they stood and stared at the havoc they had wrought.

Where the breastwork had been, there was only the raw earth and stone of the new fill. The mouth of the cavern was buried beneath the mountainside!

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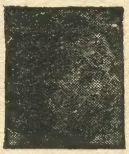
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Diana burst from the jungle, flung herself into Jesse's arms.

"Mother of God!" she cried in French. "What is it that has happened? Where is Schemmerhorn?"

He nodded silently toward the raw gash of the landslide.

"Under there."

Diana shivered against him. "But that is terrible!" Then in rising panic: "Jesse, Jesse! Where is the cave? The passage out of this accursed valley? How are we to escape?"

He gave her a queer look.

"We'll find a way out when the time comes, I reckon. We haven't really explored the valley. And I want to look at that city . . ."

The girl's eyes grew round as half dollars.

"There is no way out! That is what you mean. You and I . . ."

"Hell," he said with a twinkle in his blue eyes. "It's legal. Mrs. Grundy won't mind. Will she, Thoth?"

"Anyway," said Jesse, "I've got to teach Thoth how to make a bow."

Diana drew a deep breath, looked down at the rag ends of her yellow pajamas. "And me a grass skirt!"

Jesse eyed her with appreciation and something more. The sun was warm, sparkling. With Schemmerhorn's passing the cloud of fear had lifted from the valley.

"Eve got along with a fig leaf."

"Fig leaves are vulgar!"

Thoth rose to his feet, started down the valley towards the ruins. A dozen yards off, he paused and looked back. "Kum!" he grunted. "Kum!"

"That's right," said Jesse. "There's work to do. We start at the beginning. The very beginning. We haven't even a toothbrush."

Diana gave a low throaty laugh. "We're like the cavemen!"

"Cavemen, the devil!" he grinned catching up with Thoth. "We're not that civilized yet. We've just climbed down from the trees."

The ape and the girl and the man passed slowly from sight down the ancient road of the lost city.

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THE HOUSE OF THE SINNER
Caradoc Evans

THE LADY WHO COULDN'T BLUSH
Catulle Mendes

THE GARMENTS OF A GIRL
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. . . and that's only the beginning!

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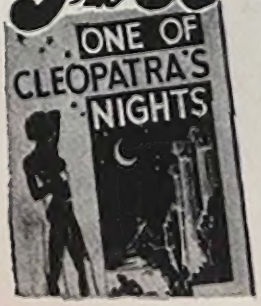

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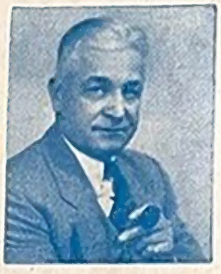
FREE TO PIPE SMOKERS

THIS NON-CONDENSING SANATON "DEMONSTRATOR" PIPE

(Just Enclose 10c to Cover Postage and Packing)

I could talk about this new kind of pipe until the cows come home. But the only way I can convince you that it gives you the coolest, sweetest, cleanest and DRIEST smoke you ever enjoyed is to send you a full-size demonstrator *free!*



DR. J. C. SHOTTON

Prominent Cleveland, Ohio, dentist — inventor of Dr. Shotton's Non-Condensing Sanaton Pipe.

IF YOU are a pipe smoker, I know how skeptical you are about new pipe inventions. So before expecting you to *buy* one of my SANATON pipes, I am offering you this DEMONSTRATOR *free!* My demonstrator will serve the purpose of proving to you that the unique SANATON NON-CONDENSING and EASY-CLEANING features give you the driest, sweetest, coolest and cleanest smoke you ever enjoyed from any pipe, regardless of name, make, or price! I am gambling that if my "demonstrator" does this, you will want one of my better grades. If not, you're out nothing except the 10c I ask for to help pay the postage and handling on the demonstrator.

What This "Demonstrator" Must Prove

Dr. Shotton's non-condensing Sanaton pipe is now being enjoyed by nearly 100,000 pipe smokers—all of whom bought it after *trying* it! Some of these fellows have been smoking pipes for 30, 40, or even 50 years. Some have from 50 to 200 pipes in their collections, and they like the Sanaton better than all the rest put together! There must be a *reason,* and here it is:

Most ordinary pipes, as you know, are equipped with tubes, traps, filters, baffles and gadgets of all kinds whose purpose it is to catch and hold "goo." However, Dr. Shotton *knew* that these gadgets actually caused *condensation* of the "goo" they collected—just as a cool pitcher of ice water in a warm room causes moisture to condense on the outer surface of the glass! He realized that the *real secret* of a dry, sweet pipe is to *prevent* "goo" from forming at all!

Now, what did Dr. Shotton do? Well, instead of placing a catch-all gadget in the Sanaton pipe, he placed a small slotted tube at the bottom of the *bowl!* This tube acts as a NON-condenser, for as you light this pipe, the tube warms up—and there's no cold surface on which "goo" can condense! No condensation, no "goo"! It's as simple as that!

Then Dr. Shotton went a step further. He extended the non-condenser tube *through* the back wall of the pipe and attached a tiny removable screw. Whenever you want to clean out the *tar* that results from tobacco *combustion,* just remove the screw and run a regular pipe cleaner through from end to end. The Sanaton cleans like a gun!

AMAZING FREE OFFER!

As I said before, I don't expect you to buy my regular Sanaton until you try my demonstrator with its non-condensing and easy-cleaning features. So I'll send you a demonstrator FREE (just send 10c to help cover postage and handling). Then if I don't hear from you within two weeks, I'll send you one of my *genuine imported briar* Sanatons and you can pay for it when it arrives. But—if you don't like the way my Sanaton *demonstrator* smokes—if you don't find it to be the driest, sweetest, cleanest and coolest smoke you *ever* had, just tell me so and I'll cancel your reservation. Isn't that a fair and square proposition?

Be sure to tell me whether you want me to reserve a Regular Sanaton at $2.50, DeLuxe Sanaton at $3.75 or Sterling Sanaton at $5.00. All my Sanatons are made of genuine aged imported briar—the only difference is in the quality, grain and finish. Be sure to let me know whether you prefer a large, medium or small bowl. (Only one demonstrator to a person, please.)

FREE DEMONSTRATOR COUPON

MARK FOSTER, Dept. DH-101
257 Fourth Ave., New York 10, N. Y.

Dear Mark: Please send me one of your Sanaton demonstrator pipes (I am enclosing 10c to cover postage and handling), and reserve a genuine Aged Imported Briar Sanaton for me in the size and grade checked below. If I don't like the way the demonstrator smokes, I will cancel my reservation within two weeks—otherwise send it to me and I will pay the postman for it (plus few cents postage) when it arrives. (Check one box in each column.)

☐ Regular, $2.50	☐ Small bowl
☐ De Luxe, $3.75	☐ Medium bowl
☐ Sterling, $5.00	☐ Large bowl

Name.....

Address.....

City, Zone, State .....

NOTE: If you want your genuine briar Sanaton at once, enclose remittance and I'll send it along with the demonstrator, prepaid. Smoke the demonstrator—and if you don't like it, return the genuine briar Sanaton unsmoked for refund. For your courtesy in remitting with coupon, I will include a big bunch of extra long pipe cleaners free.